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The COVID-19 pandemic: A multidimensional crisis

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SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic hit nations in all continents hard with the Americas standing out as the world´s hardest-hit region. Government responses have been varying in timeliness, stringency, and results with outcomes being independent of regime type or political system but influenced by early action and the severity of containment strategies.

The economic and financial impact of the pandemic has been estimated at a US$ 8,8 trillion decrease of the global GDP, more than the economies of Japan and Germany combined, and threatening the destruction of nearly half the global workforce livelihoods. Governments worldwide have announced unprecedented rescue packages to the tune of around US$ 10 trillion 40 percent of the global GDP.

The pandemic hit Venezuela during a generalized humanitarian crisis and the health system in tatters. The real dimension of the pandemic is a mystery due to the opaqueness of the virus-related data published by the government. Due to the shortage of protective gear and disinfectants in run-down public hospitals, the virus-related death toll among medical staff is extremely high. The health authorities miss the minimum testing standards of the WHO.

It is unlikely that our post-pandemic lives will return to their pre-pandemic characteristics, especially in the areas of learning, retail, tourism, and other services. The pandemic may be a catalyst for a new normalcy with teleworking heading toward a working-from-home-economy.

Key words: *Pandemic, COVID-19, health system preparedness, Government Response Stringency Index, containment strategies, government performance, economic/financial impact, Venezuela, working-from-home, new normalcy.*

RESUMEN

La pandemia del COVID-19 ha afectado duramente a las naciones de todos los continentes, destacando América como la región más afectada del mundo. Las respuestas de los gobiernos han variado en cuanto a oportunidad, rigor y resultados. Los impactos han sido independientes del tipo de régimen o sistema político, pero han estado influidos por las medidas tempranas y la severidad de las estrategias de contención.

Se ha estimado que las repercusiones económicas y financieras de la pandemia han supuesto una disminución de 8,8 trillones de dólares del PIB mundial, más que las economías del Japón y Alemania juntas, y que amenazan con destruir los medios de vida de casi la mitad de la fuerza de trabajo mundial. Los gobiernos de todo el mundo han anunciado paquetes de rescate sin precedentes por valor de 10 trillones de dólares o el 40 % del PIB mundial.

La pandemia golpeó a Venezuela en medio de una crisis humanitaria generalizada y el sistema de salud en ruinas. La dimensión real de la pandemia es un misterio debido a la opacidad de los datos relacionados con el virus que ha publicado el gobierno. Debido a la escasez de equipos de protección y desinfectantes en los hospitales públicos deteriorados, el número de muertes de personal médico relacionadas con el virus es extremadamente alto. Las autoridades sanitarias no cumplen los requisitos mínimos de pruebas establecidos por la OMS.

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Es poco probable que nuestras vidas en la pos-pandemia vuelvan a sus características pre-pandémicas, especialmente en las áreas de aprendizaje, comercio, turismo y otros servicios. La pandemia puede ser un catalizador para una nueva normalidad con el teletrabajo orientado hacia una economía de trabajo desde los hogares.

Palabras clave*: Pandemia, COVID-19, preparación del sistema de salud, Índice de Rigurosidad de Políticas, estrategias de contención, desempeño del gobierno, impacto económico/financiero, Venezuela, teletrabajo, nueva normalidad.*

The big picture

The novel coronavirus COVID-19 was first identified toward the end of 2019 in Wuhan, a closely connected industrial, commercial, and financial hub in Central China. It spread fast from Asia across the globe (Figure 1) (1), sparing barely a handful of Polynesian microstates, and was recognized as a pandemic by the WHO on the 11th March 2020.

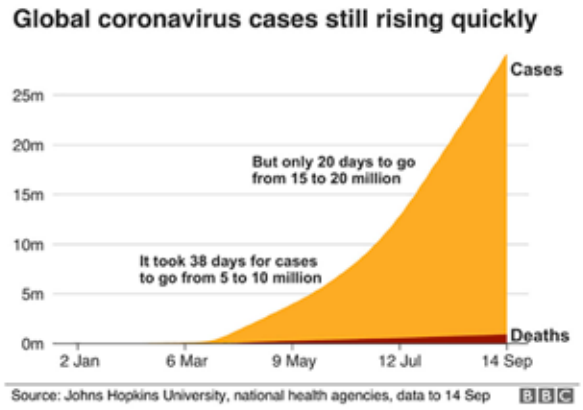

Figure 1.

The pandemic hit nations in all continents extremely hard, with the Americas standing out as the world´s hardest-hit region. According to the statistical update as of mid-September 2020, of the ten countries with the highest mortality rates, 8 were in the Americas. In just a few months, its exponential spread and the authorities´ responses in the form of containment measures such as school, workplace, and restaurant closures, cancellation of public events, restrictions on mass gatherings, travel bans, testing policy, contact tracing, quarantine and border closures have wrought havoc upon mankind.

As of mid-September 2020, the global infection cases count was up to nearly 30 million, with about 1 million deaths. The containment measures triggered the worst recession since the Great Depression. An IMF study from a historical perspective concludes that decades of progress in poverty reduction and education might already have been lost to the pandemic (2). World Bank Chief Economist *Carmen Reinhart* and Stanford University´s *Vincent Reinhart* refer to the slump as the "*pandemic depression*" and think the global economy will never be the same: "*The shared nature of this shock- the novel coronavirus does not respect national borders – has put a larger proportion of the global community in recession than at any other time since the Great Depression. As a result, the recovery will not be as robust as the downturn"* (3).

On the other hand, the pandemic has been a catalyst for social change upending everyday life in a variety of aspects and opening opportunities for further development, from the organization of learning and work to commuting and lifestyles. Lockdowns travel bans, school closures, and increased work, from home helped reduce emissions and pollution, at least a sigh of relief in the climate change that may translate to opportunities for further efforts and investments to make it sustainable once the world returns to a "new normalcy".

Government responses to the coronavirus pandemic have been different in timeliness, stringency, and results. Independent of regime type or political system, some countries have done well while others have not. Even the *Global Health Security Index* scores on the level of preparation to respond to a pandemic are not predictors of good performance in controlling the COVID-19: half of the ten best-prepared systems (Figure 2) (4), the United Kingdom United States, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Canada present mortality rates well above the global average, with one more -Denmark- scores just close to it (Figure 3).

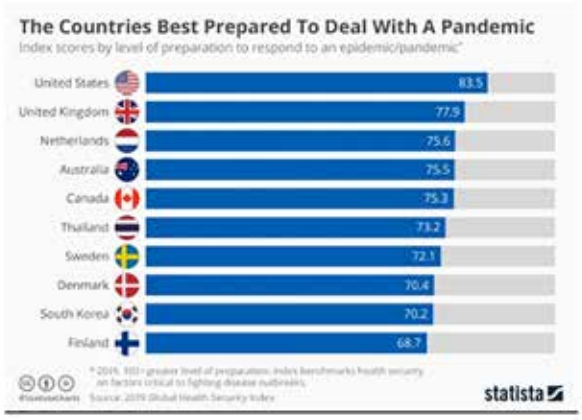

Figure 2.
Source: (4).

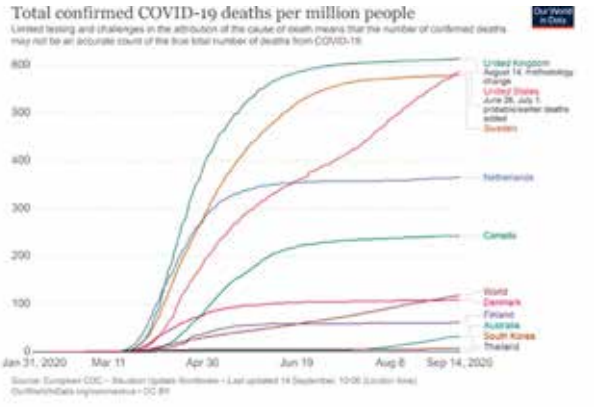

Figure 3.

On the other hand, evidence demonstrates that the timeliness and severity of government strategies designed to control the exponential growth of cases and bend the curve have influenced outcomes. In a multivariate analysis of data covering 194 countries, Leffler et al. (5) found that lower mortality rates were associated with the timing of containment measures as well as the duration of mask-wearing in public and travel bans, while viral testing and tracing policies were not. According to a Columbia University study (6), had the United States responded with its lockdown just one week earlier in March 2020, around 36 000 lives would have been saved, and over 50 000, had the lockdown begun in early March 2020.

A research team at Oxford University´s *Blavatnik School of Government* created a COVID-19 *Government Response Stringency Index* based on 17 indicators covering 180 countries. They caution "*that these indices simply record the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response. A higher position in an index does not necessarily mean that a country's response is 'better' than others lower on the index* (7), and the dataset actually reflects a mixed picture but still points at a relation between the timing and severity of measures.

By mid-March, shortly after the WHO had declared COVID-19 a pandemic, all in a group of ten countries – five with the highest confirmed case scores as of mid-September, three of them in the Americas and two in Asia (United States, Brazil India, Russia, Peru), and five with low confirmed case scores, four in Asia and one in the Americas (China, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Uruguay), all began to impose relatively or very severe containment policies, or had had some in place already before, such as China (Figure 4) (8).

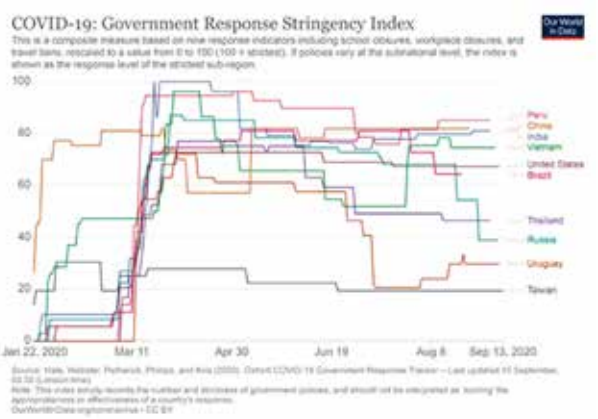

Figure 4.

From the same point of time on, the five countries with low confirmed case scores managed to bend the pandemic curve and keep it roughly flat, except for Vietnam which experienced a slight surge from the end of August,

while the five with high confirmed case scores did not, with their curves surging further from May through September. A closer look reveals that the governments of Thailand, Uruguay, and Taiwan did quite well in mitigating or suppressing the pandemic without imposing extremely severe containment measures, as did China and Vietnam with policies of very high stringency scores throughout the period. Having imposed policies of equally high stringency, Peru, India, Russia, and Brazil fared far worse, as did the United States with its medium-range stringency score policies (Figure 5) (9).

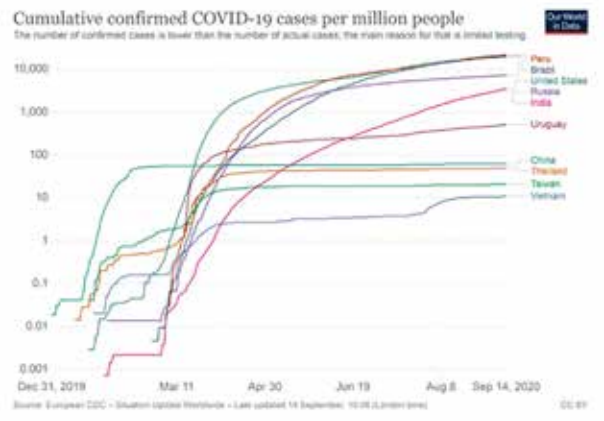

Figure 5.

In a nutshell, the overall stringency score of containment strategies alone does not explain policy outcomes. In a study on national policies and success in bending the rising curve of cases, Migone (10) found that early action was helpful "*independently from how strict the final policies were: Australia, Japan, and South Korea targeted early on the spread of the disease and generally the Stringency Index was relatively low. Countries like Spain and Belgium ramped up their policy measures dramatically but appear to have done so after the window of opportunity had closed and very stringent rules seem to have had limited effect on medical outcomes*".

Politics and the Pandemic

The relationship between politics and the novel coronavirus pandemic is as complex as the phenomenon itself. Scholarly observers agree —as I mentioned above— that the effectiveness of government responses designed to contain and suppress the disease is unrelated to the type of political regime or system type, democratic or not, centralist or federal. Some, e.g. Diamond (11), see a democratic regression and existing autocrats seizing the opportunity of the disease to tighten their control over the public and strengthen their positions but point out that "*democracy was faltering globally even before the pandemic*". In the same vein, Fukuyama (12) adds that it is not a matter of regime type whether a country handles the crisis better than others but that the "*factors responsible for successful pandemic responses have been state capacity, social trust, and leadership"*.

Statistical evidence does not support the Fukuyama thesis convincingly; the problem seems to be more complex. As for state capacity, of the ten countries with top scores in Moscow´s *Higher School of Economics* State Capacity Index (13), only four reports confirmed corona-related deaths per million people below the world average. As for social report, of the top ten countries ranked in the social capital pillar of the *Legatum Prosperity Index* (14), again only four report corona-related deaths per million people below the average.

As for leadership, the picture is still mixed but somewhat more conclusive. Understanding the public´s COVID-19-related leadership perception as a process beginning after the outbreak of the pandemic when containment strategies were in place, I compared the net approval ratings of 13 world leaders from mid-March through the beginning of September 2020 and the outcome of their handling of the pandemic in terms of deaths per million people. Leadership approval should not be confounded with the approval of policies. Using the data series published by *Morning Consult Political Intelligence* (15) and *Our World in Data* (16), I found that eight of those leaders pursued strategies that produced results better than the world average, while five failed to best that average (Table 1).

Table 1

World leaders approval ratings and coronavirus containment policy results

Leader*	Net Approval** 2020 Mid-March	Mid-May	Mid-July	9th Sept	Deaths***
Merkel/Germany	-11	22	23	22	0.05
Moon/South Korea	n.d.	24	11	12	0.07
Abe/Japan	-23	-31	-33	-6	0.08
Trudeau/Canada	-17	30	11	5	0.14
Conte/Italy	n.d.	34	23	27	0.16
Johnson/UK	2	-18	-5	-15	0.19
Morrison/Australia	-19	40	37	31	0.24
Macron/France	-37	-25	-32	-29	0.55
World				0.68	
Modi/India	53	64	58	52	0.84
Sánchez/Spain	n.d.	-6	-9	-11	1.88
Trump/US	-9	-7	-14	-12	2.58
López Obrador/Mexico	30	28	26	26	3.19
Bolsonaro/Brazil	20	-9	0	4	3.74

* Ordered by lowest to the highest death toll

**The share of each country's residents that approve minus the share that disapproves of their respective head of state. Source: (15)

***Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people. Source: (16).

Two of the leaders who enjoyed the highest approval ratings throughout the period, namely *Modi* and *López Obrador*, handled the pandemic in ways that were unsuccessful under the terms of this comparison, with *López* having presided over the second-worst outcome, while *Conte* enjoyed high positive ratings consistent with the policy outcome. The ratings of three leaders – *Merkel*, *Trudeau*, and *Morrison*, jumped from quite negative to very positive also consistent with their successful handling of the crisis. *Abe, Macron, Sánchez,* and *Trump* saw negative ratings throughout the period, even though the first two achieved positive results under the terms established here. Of the remaining two, *Johnson´s* approval plummeted despite a better-than-average result while *Bolsonaro* first took a dip and then recovered positive scores despite having presided over the public policy strategy with the worst outcome in the sample.

The leadership perception picture as presented here suggests that Coronavirus-related public policies were in many cases, not the only or even decisive factor being evaluated by public opinion. There seems to be no fit for all pattern for the relationship of politics to the coronavirus pandemic.

Public opinion on their government's handling of the pandemic and trust in the national health authorities also draw a mixed picture as both governments and health authorities that achieved good results in terms of daily new confirmed deaths were consistent with those results in some cases but not in others. For the same selection of countries used in the leaders´ approval ratings, the public opinion varied widely as shown in Table 2.

The publics of Canada and India express very high or the highest government approval and confidence ratings, the first consistent with performance, the second not at all. Best performance does not guarantee the best "marks" (Germany, Japan), and the difference between government approval and confidence in health authorities, often enough appointed by those governments, can be significant (United Kingdom, Spain). The approval of the government increases only in Japan while

Table 2

Evaluation of governments handling the pandemic and confidence in health authorities (2020)

Country*	Government handling pandemic well		Confidence in Health Authorities	
	Beginning of April	End of August	Beginning of April	End of August
Germany	71	70	68	65
South Korea	n.d.	n.d.	86	76
Japan	31	42	45	52
Canada	79	74	80	78
Italy	71	62	78	66
United Kingdom	72	40	81	77
Australia	76	79	69	79
France	40	37	59	49
India	90	77	87	71
Spain	36	36	87	76
United States	51	38	63	47
Mexico	43	31	41	41
Brazil	n.d.	n.d.	57	43

Source: (17).

confidence in the health authorities increases in Australia and Japan. In most cases, both ratings drop slightly and more; the sharpest drop is registered for the approval of the United Kingdom government's handling of the pandemic. Again, a mixed picture.

In their meta-analysis, Devine et al. (18) review several studies focused on the "*relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic, government responses, and political and social trust*". They present their findings in a table which I reproduce here (Table 3).

Economic fallout and financial stimulus

The economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic is unprecedented. According to the latest IMF World Economic Outlook (June 2020), advanced as well as emerging economies will experience depression up to nearly 13 % of GDP with the only exception of China which is projected to grow 1 %. The global economy will decrease by -4.9 %, with advanced economies plummeting -8 % and emerging & developing economies taking a hit of -3 % (Table 4). The world economy is expected to recover in 2021, in part due to the stimulus packages announced by governments but the IMF (19) warns that "Alternative outcomes to those in the baseline are possible".

A later forecast by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (20) that includes the projected impact of the massive rescue programs announced by many governments and the European Union after June is somewhat more optimistic (Table 5).

Due to the lockdown, social distancing, and other restrictions imposed by governments, most sectors were hit hard by the pandemic, especially automobiles, aviation, transportation, education services, and other services, especially tourism. While big companies are in a better position to shoulder the burden, and the IT and online retail giants even profit from the crisis, smaller businesses will suffer most.

At the global level, the *Asian Development Bank* (21) expects the value of the losses inflicted by the pandemic could amount to $8.8 trn, more than the economies of Japan and Germany combined.

The *International Labor Organization* (22) estimates the full-time job losses at around 300 million and warns that "*The continued sharp decline in working hours globally due to*

Table 3

Selected studies on the coronavirus pandemic and trust (February to July 2020)

Area	Findings	Countries	Authors
Implementation	Higher societal and political trust is associated with the later adoption of restrictive policies	European Union countries	Toshkov, Yesilkagit, and Carroll
Compliance	Compliance is greater in those with higher trust, but this may be conditional on trust in those who deliver the orders rather than trust in general. One study finds social trust is negatively related to compliance in the United States.	The United States, Denmark	Goldstein and Wiedermann; Olsen and Hjorth; Han et al.
Risk perception	Risk perception is negatively associated with trust in government. Conversely, risk perception is higher when individuals have low trust in science and medical professionals.	The United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Mexico, Japan, and South Korea	Dryhurst et al.
Mortality	Institutional trust is associated with lower levels of mortality.	European Union countries	Oksanan, Kaakine, Latikka, Savolainen, Savlea, Kovula
Consequences for trust	Personal exposure to COVID-19 is associated with reduced trust; implementation of lockdowns may lead to higher trust (but see below). Higher social trust is a result of political trust. A government that is organized, clear in messaging, and perceived as fair increased trust. Lockdowns even in other countries may increase political trust. Trust was driven by the growing number of those with the virus, not by lockdowns themselves.	European Union countries, Spain, Denmark, 23 countries globally	Balis, Bol, Giani, Loewen; Amat, Falcó-Gimeno, Arenas, Muñoz; Madsen, Mikkelsen, Christensen, Baekgaard; Esaiasson, Sohlberg, Ghersetti, Johanson; Han et al.; De Vries, Bakker, Hobolt, Arcenaux; Schraff

Source: (18).

the COVID-19 outbreak means that 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy —*that is nearly half of the global workforce— stand in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed"*.

To help stimulate post-pandemic recovery, governments have announced rescue programs far beyond the scope of the rescue packages following the 2008 financial crisis. McKinsey (23) estimates the combined value of the programs proposed by 54 governments worldwide at around $10 trillion or 40 % of the global GDP, aimed at maintaining financial stability, household economic welfare, and help companies survive. The biggest stimulus responses in terms of % of GDP are distributed

Table 4

World economic outlook June 2020
GDP growth projections

Real GDP, annual percentage change	2020	2021
World output	-4.9	5.4
Advanced Economies	-8.0	4.8
United States	-9.0	4.5
Euro Area	-10.2	6.0
Japan	-8.8	2.4
United Kingdom	-10.2	6.3
Canada	-8.4	4.9
Other Advanced Economies	-4.8	4.2
Emerging markets and developing economies	3.0	5.9
Emerging and Developing Asia	-0.8	7.4
Emerging and Developing Europe	-5.8	4.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	-9.4	3.7
The Middle East and Central Asia	-4.7	3.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	-3.2	3.4
Low Income Developing Countries	-1.0	5.2

Source: (19).

Table 5

OECD economic outlook September 2020
Real GDP growth, % year-on-year

Country	2020	2021
Canada	-5.8	4.0
China	1.8	8.0
France	-9.5	5.8
Japan	-5.8	1.5
United Kingdom	-10.1	7.6
United States	-3.8	4.0
World	-4.5	5.0
Euro Area	-7.9	5.1
G20	-4.1	5.7

Source: (20).

Table 6

Stimulus responses per country, in % of GDP

Country	% GDP
Germany	33.0
Japan	21.0
France	14.6
United Kingdom	14.5
United States	12.1
Canada	11.8
India	10.0
South Africa	8.6
Brazil	6.5

Source: (23).

as shown in Table 6.

While the bulk of the funds for the rescue and stimulus programs comes from increased government debt, there are also different forms of financing such as Coronavirus bonds issued by entities formed by two or more central governments to promote development for the members (*Sovereign, Supranational, and Agency/* SSA). For its part, the *European Union* reached an unprecedented aid and budget deal worth $ 1.85 trillion, composed of an aid package of over $ 750 billion and a 7-year budget of around $ 1.1 trillion (24).

The Venezuelan nightmare-cum-pandemic

Even before the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuela had been mired in a political, economic, and humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. With oil production

down to a trickle, the economy ruined, physical infrastructure in tatters, its GDP per capita had plummeted to a bare one-seventh of its peak value before the "revolution", falling back to the handful of poorest countries of Latin America leaving behind only Nicaragua and Haiti. The country´s health system was ill-prepared to adequately handle a pandemic. Fortunately, the virus spread to Venezuela with some delay compared with its neighbors Brazil and Colombia, probably due to its preexisting near-total isolation from international traffic.

The autocratic regime did not waste time to seize the opportunity of "fighting" the pandemic to invoke emergency powers to tighten its control and "legitimize" the already usual brutal repression of social protests against failing services and supply shortages arguing "public safety concerns". Fortunately enough, the early strict response — lockdown, school and university closures, cancellation of events, social distance rules including quarantine, and obligatory face masks in public — helped to contain the spread of the disease, at least initially.

The country´s hospitals are ill-prepared to receive and treat coronavirus patients. Most of them have no running water, insufficient provision of disinfectants, and above all, a severe shortage of protective gear (PPE) for doctors and paramedics. As a consequence, the death toll among health workers in Venezuela extremely high. Around mid-September 2020, the Venezuelan Medical Federation lists 126 deaths of doctors and nurses who had been fighting the spread of the disease under the toughest conditions and without the required protective measures, more than one-fifth of the total coronavirus-related deaths at that time (25). Protests of healthcare workers against their inadequate working conditions were brutally repressed and over a dozen were detained for publicly criticizing the situation (26).

President Maduro rated the country´s health system as excellent, he said: "you´re are given the care that´s unique in the world, humane care, loving, Christian" (26). His henchmen far from convinced. The two dozen of them who got sick with coronavirus preferred to seek treatment in costly private clinics to avoid the deadly risk associated with public health institutions if you are seriously ill.

The real dimension of the pandemic is a mystery. As with all information on government performance, the coronavirus-related data published by the authorities cannot be trusted. Health workers are warned not to reveal any information about cases and the situation in their workplace. Testing is insufficient, getting the results takes too long because there is only one laboratory in the country capable of carrying out the PCR tests. Apart from the information opaqueness, Venezuela is probably the only country where having gotten sick with coronavirus is considered a crime (as long as you are not a regime buddy, of course). People who were fast-tested positive were forcefully quarantined in makeshift quarters without minimum facilities; most of them never received a confirmed test result. Venezuelan migrants who had lost their jobs in Colombia due to the pandemic and who returned to their country were corralled in temporary camps and characterized by official spokespersons as "bioterrorists" who were spreading the disease to the fatherland. Meanwhile, Colombian guerrillas, narcotics, and mining mafias crossed that border without being bothered.

Civilian thugs or "colectivos" heavily armed by the government control the peoples' movements in the densely populated barrios enforcing the lockdown. In the poor communities, where most work in the informal sector, people have simply two options: comply staying at home and starve or defy the lockdown and go out and get some food for sheer survival.

Salomón and Bensayag (27), provide evidence that the Venezuelan health authorities grossly miss the minimum testing standards of the WHO. As a consequence, the official picture of the pandemic must be considered as a flagrant understatement of the real situation. The recent upward trajectory of the curve of confirmed cases underscores that point of view.

Toward new normalcy?

As the pandemic spread and governments the world over responded with severe containment measures, our way of life and habits have changed profoundly. It is unlikely that our post-pandemic lives will return to their pre-pandemic

characteristics. While some of the innovations and changes brought about in this period may be or even better should be scrapped – such as the COVID-19 tracking applications – others have come to stay, especially in the fields of learning, commute, workplace, retail, and tourism and travel industry, among other services.

For this occasion, I focus on one aspect, namely the changes in the workplace, after some comments on the tracking apps. Private and state-owned IT firms and Silicon Valley giants like Google and Apple have developed smartphone contact tracing applications that were launched by dozens of countries, either voluntarily or mandatory as was done in China. Such applications identify the persons the user has come in contact with and alert if any of those contacts turns out to be a confirmed Coronavirus carrier. Obviously, such applications are double-edged swords that may be helping keep the contagion in check but also raise privacy concerns as they allow governments to misuse the information for social control.

O´Neal et al. (28) compare Coronavirus tracking apps around the world, rating them on a five-star scale based on the answers to the following questions:

"Is it voluntary? *In some cases, apps are opt-in—but in other places, many or all citizens are compelled to download and use them.*

Are there limitations on how the data gets used? *Data may sometimes be used for purposes other than public health, such as law enforcement—and that may last longer than COVID-19.*

Will data be destroyed after a period of time? *The data the apps collect should not last forever. If it is automatically deleted in a reasonable amount of time (usually a maximum of around 30 days) or the app allows users to manually delete their data, we award a star.*

Is data collection minimized? *Does the app collect only the information it needs to do what it says?*

Is the effort transparent? *Transparency can take the form of clear, publicly available policies and design, an open-source code base, or all of these".*

For each affirmative answer, they award one star. Of the over 40 apps reviewed, only eleven got five stars; as was to be expected, on average democracies did better than autocracies.

As for the changes in the workplace environment, Stanford economist *Nicholas Bloom* argues (29) that the "*US economy is now a working from home economy… were working from home accounts for around 60 % of economic activity"*. Likewise, the OECD sees the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for the increased use of teleworking in the post-pandemic era (30). Flexible or remote working had been an option which companies worldwide offered some of their staff; a 2019 survey by the *International Workplace Group* (31) of over 15 000 business people across 80 nations found that 62 % of global companies had a flexible workspace policy in place and that three out of four employees considered flexible working as the "new normal".

The lockdown and other restrictive government regulations aimed at suppressing the spread of the Coronavirus forced businesses to innovate and design strategies to introduce or increase working from home. Many employees who had not been included in such schemes before the crisis gained new experiences and became accustomed to their new working environments. Their personal experiences and those of the businesses may be catalysts for further innovations in the post-pandemic era. A survey conducted in May for the Federal Reserve Bank Atlanta (32) found that firms expect remote work to triple, and a post-COVID-19 pandemic forecast by Global Workplace Analytics (33) estimates "*that 25-30 % of the workforce will be working-from-home multiple days a week by the end of 2021*".

The Q1/2020 update of *Global Remote Working Data and Statistics* (34) found that younger employees represent the bulk of remote workers, that working from home (WFH) increased productivity and lowered costs, helped to attract and retain talent, and improved the wellbeing of workers. WFH also produces a positive impact on the environment as workers spent less time and fuel commuting.

Apart from individual feelings reported by remote workers such as loneliness, difficulties to switch off from work, and not being provided

the latest technology by their employers, the downsides of WFH include inequality and the loss of the daily spending of commuters in restaurants and shops. *Bloom* (29) speaks of an *inequality time bomb* only about half of the jobs can be carried out working from home, many employees lack adequate facilities for WFH such as extra rooms, and WFH favors educated high-income employees. Despite the downsides, *Bloom* concludes that WFH is here to stay.

In the September 2020 update of its *Policy Responses to COVID-19 Report* (30), the OECD supposes that telework will be an integral part of the future working environment and that public policies can contribute a great deal to advance it. The report cautions that "*While more widespread telework in the longer-run has the potential to improve productivity and a range of other economic and social indicators (worker well-being, gender equality, regional inequalities, housing, and emissions), its overall impact is ambiguous and carries risks especially for innovation and worker satisfaction.*" And recommends that to "*improve the gains from more widespread teleworking for productivity and innovation, policymakers can promote the diffusion of managerial best practices, self-management, and ICT skills, investments in home offices, and fast and reliable broadband across the country*".

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