

Global Discourse

2021: Volume 11: Issue 1

Understanding the Politics of Fear: COVID-19, Crises and Democracy

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Abstract

The COVID-19 Pandemic has thrust the emotion of fear into the heart of political debate, policy making, public trust in democracy and government messaging. This issue's core assumption is that a focus on the concept of fear, in general, and one that is attuned to the unfolding 'politics of fear', in particular, provides a powerful framework through which to assess some of the challenges and opportunities posed by COVID-19.

We take Judith Shklar's assertion of fear as the driving principle of liberalism as an invitation to 'think politically' with the aim of exploring the political meanings and implications of fear in the context of the coronavirus crisis. While we actively encourage engagement from a wide range of perspectives, we suggest that there are at least five approaches that call for examination in the present:

- 1) Phillip Pettit and the place of 'unpredictability' in liberalism;
- 2) Martha Nussbaum and fear as '(ir)rationality';
- 3) Zygmunt Bauman on 'liquidity' and fear;
- 4) Hannah Arendt and 'autocratization' and,
- 5) Sarah Ahmad and the relationship between fear and inequality.

What do these approaches miss and, more broadly, what alternative yet analytically powerful approaches have been overlooked?

This issue seeks to explore the applications and implications of approaches such as these, and more, in order to enhance understanding of politics 'as theory' and politics 'as practice' in times of pandemic. The issue will examine the following set of questions and more:

Theme 1: unpredictability and liberalism

- Normatively, in what ways can the two accounts of negative liberty outlined by Pettit address politically unintentional interference from human agents in transmitting the virus and the impact of non-human agents on conceptions of the good?

- In what ways should government respond to individuals who do not adapt their preferences to demonstrable threat?
- And, from a view of statesmanship, how should such people be treated when their views run counter to scientific expertise and public health?
- Empirically, how do conceptions of the good of those who do not fear threats like COVID-19 affect policy making?

Theme 2: fear as '(ir)rationality'

- What does the proper political balance between too much fear and insufficient fear look like?
- Related to this, to what extent should government exercise agency in light of expert guidance?
- What interests should be balanced when considering the impact of pandemic on non-health elements of people's lives?
- Given that experts make reference to objective realities, but disagree about the objective impact of policy, are there means of interrogating experts in terms of ideological commitments as well as instrumentally according to the accuracy of claims?

Theme 3: 'liquidity' and fear

- How can the accretion or sedimentation of fears be conceptualized or understood?
- In what ways do 'derivative fears' affect different sections of society and what is the interplay between different forms of fear that need to be considered alongside issues of (un)predictability and (ir)rationality?

Theme 4: 'autocratization'

- How will our present fears affect the decline of democratic traits?
- Must these fears necessarily hasten the decline, or can they be directed towards reinforcing democratic institutions and principles?
- What is the relationship between fear and trust in politics?

Theme 5: fear and inequality

- What need might we have for fear once the crisis has passed in order to help fuel and guide political action to address the institutional weaknesses, socioeconomic inequalities, and other issues that have exacerbated pandemic, so that we do not end up here once again?
- How can we understand how to sustain fear in government and among citizens in order to achieve those longer-term ends?

Submission instructions and deadlines

Abstracts of 400 words: 8th June 2020

Articles (solicited on the basis of review of abstracts): 1st October 2020

Publication: Early 2021

Please prepare your manuscript in accordance with the [Journal instructions for authors](#). Please submit all abstracts and articles to Dan Degerman (ddegerman@hotmail.com).

Journal Aims and Scope

Global Discourse is an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented journal of applied contemporary thought operating at the intersection of politics, international relations, sociology and social policy. Rejecting the notion that publication is the final stage in the research process, *Global Discourse* seeks to foster discussion and debate between often artificially isolated disciplines and paradigms, with responses to articles encouraged and conversations continued across issues.