The question of democracy in times of crisis: during the COVID-19 pandemic

Major countries involved in the sanitary crisis of Covid-19

| BRAZIL | ITALY | FRANCE | PRC | USA | UK |

“We can consider that Covid-19 leads the world into its first real worldwide crisis. Nor 9-11 or the 2008’s crisis have had affected as many countries at the same time.”

« To the extent that we are deprived of our freedoms to protect us, should we necessarily consider that as anti-democratic? »

MASMOUDI Sirine, CAMBLIN Danceny - Political committee chairs - 2021
I) Introduction

- Democracy is the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/democracy

- Possible times of crisis:

  - **Sanitary crisis**: events which could or is affecting a great number of people through their health, and therefore potentially increasing the significant factors of mortality or excess mortality. (main topic of for the debate)
- **Financial crisis**: fairly broad set including in particular currency, banking and stock market crisis, recurring in stock market history. E.g: global financial crisis of 2008

- **War**: state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country. E.g: Gulf War (1990-1991)

- **Natural disaster**: natural event such as a flood, earthquake, or hurricane which causes great damages or loss of lives.

➢ As though setting boundaries on people’s liberties (not being able to go out and being under a strict lockdown) are against the fundamental rights instituted by the very democracy most of the countries are ruled under, it seems necessary to act for the safety of a country’s population, and so, taking extreme measures. The obligations that the democratic countries are supposed to follow are not going to help properly decreasing the spreading of the virus.

*Main issue: Keeping the democracy as unchanged as possible while putting measures for the safety and the health of all.*
II) Brainstorm

➢ Covid-19’s recent numbers reflects how a country’s democracy can influence on their ways to handle the crisis. Indeed, the more democratic the state was, the harder the decisions were to make in order to maintain as much as possible the democratic measures instituted in the country. Whereas in the authoritarians states, the democracy wasn’t and still isn’t the priority for their leaders, so the choices were easier to make.

➢ Summarized country’s position:

- **Democratic Republic of the Congo**: The USAID (united state agency of international development) has supported community radio in order to disseminate information on COVID-19 and counter misinformation, including production of the song “Toko Longa Corona” (“We will beat the Coronavirus”) by leading Congolese artists.

- **Iran and Syria**: The US State Department, in coordination with international partners, has consistently shed light on the lies of the Iranian and Syrian regimes and called for accountability for their actions at the UN Security Council. These brutal regimes continue to focus on violently cracking down on dissent and sowing disinformation on the impact of U.S. and EU sanctions instead of committing to take critical actions to mitigate the danger of COVID-19, such as the release of arbitrarily held detainees from overcrowded prisons. The solutions put in place remained pretty much ineffective.

- **Russia**: the State Department has condemned threats of violence made by the head of Russia’s Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, against two journalists over their coverage of the pandemic, as well as Russian federal authorities’ decisions to censor articles unfavorably covering the government’s pandemic response. The solutions put in place remained pretty much ineffective as well.

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- **USA**, as a member of the Freedom Online Coalition, Media Freedom Coalition, Global Action on Disability network, Community of Democracies, and Open Government Partnership, the United States has been an active partner in calling on governments to respect democratic values and human rights in their responses to COVID-19. In the face of an alarming global increase of gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic, U.S. assistance — such as the *Voices Against Violence Initiative*— funds hotlines and psychosocial support services for survivors and those at risk of GBV. U.S. programs continue to provide significant resources for LGBTI persons through emergency assistance, security trainings, and short-term urgent programmatic interventions that advocate for inclusive COVID-19 relief efforts and provide legal support to human rights defenders. Less well prepared for the situation, less able to find the « good answers » to the issue.

- **France**: Through the lockdown, French people have lost a lot of liberties such as “liberté de déplacement” meaning they can’t go wherever they want and as often as they want, freedom of cult (since religious establishments are closed, the pious can’t fully fulfill their religious path. “These violations of our most fundamental rights cannot be made outside any framework, even on a temporary basis ». Less well prepared for the situation, less able to find the « good answers » to the issue.

- **China**: China is using the lockdown to their advantage so they can stop and over thrown the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong……. The authoritarian regimes were very successful for the handling of the virus since they don’t have the measures of democracy.

- **DPRK**: DPRK *claims it has had no coronavirus cases*. But it was one of the first countries to shut its border, aware that its woefully underequipped public health system made it particularly vulnerable to mass infection…

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- **Brazil**: “denial of the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic, [brazil] is turning its back on international recommendations.” “When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 as a pandemic and recommended a series of measures, such as social distancing, [Bolsonaro] went in the opposite direction, saying that it was an absurdity, that there is no scientific evidence and that quarantines will ruin the country.”

- **Italy**: “Measures to contain free movement and prohibitions on assembly have led to the temporary limitation, if not suspension, of some fundamental rights, such as the right to mobility, to meet, to demonstrate, to family life. Over four billion people are now suffering under varying degrees of restriction of civil rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, this crisis is occurring in a global context where democracy and the civic space were already under attack.” “As far as the impacts of COVID-19 on fundamental rights and on the quality of democracy are concerned, two situations can be identified. In states where restrictions and violations were rampant before the COVID-19 emergency is being used to strengthen the grip and increase repression and antidemocratic features. These are states where exception is the rule. In states where democracy still exists, albeit with the limitations described in the CIVICUS report, the COVID-19 emergency risks paving the way for dangerous restrictions that might persist also when the “emergency” is supposedly over.”

- **UK**: Less well prepared for the situation, less able to find the « good answers » to the issue.
III) Previous resolutions

Throughout the world, one main resolution has been applied, the lockdown. Indeed, this solution is not the best way to respect the democratic measures, but in many countries, it helped the spreading of the virus to decrease, therefore saving a great number of lives. But a lot of those countries have known their waves of protests marches and oppositions from the populations and governments.
IV) Possible solutions

- Restrain the state of emergency for extreme situations
- Favor democracy and individual liberties in times of crises
- Favor the adjournment of the liberties during a expected time frame in order to protect the populations
- Leave the situation as it is and encourage the populations to go out and live their lives as usual, with the aim of creating a general immunity, so that everyone is protected against the virus.

You have several possible resolutions, be ORIGINAL 😊!

V) Tips

Now, we’re supposed to give you some advices to prepare correctly your MUN. So, with our experience of delegate, we can tell you some things... First, do (a lot of) researches about your country! You have to know, at least, the policy of your country. Then, you can do other researches about the actualities, in the news, for example...
Second, we recommend you to do some (smaller) researches on the other countries of the committee, to know who’s your friend and who’s your enemy; it can help you a lot! Then, try to write a clause before arriving at the MUN and bring it on a pendrive please. ;) More specifically on this topic; pay attention to the position of your country on the subject and don’t say false or invented things! Here’s a very cool trick that comes from listening. Start by agreeing with the other delegation, with what can be agreed with (and what won’t hurt you) and then, refute it. It will make the power of your refute multiply. If you want to be convincing, capture and maintain attention, or be influential, use your body language and know the importance of non-verbal communication. This is the biggest conveyor of what you want to say.
How? Have confidence!
We hope that these tips help you and that you’ll have fun ;)
VI) Bibliography