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DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE: THREE GLOBAL TRENDS AND HOW THEY HIGHLIGHT THE CASE OF “AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM” AND THE NEED TO RE-THINK IR THEORY

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Abstract

Spurred on by emergency Covid-laws and the desire to defeat Covid-19 by any means necessary, governments globally are using their newfound powers to steadily diminish the level of democracy in their countries. This malfeasance is not only occurring in institutionally weak states but in traditionally strong democratic states. Deploying examples from across the globe, this paper highlights the decline in democracy from three perspectives, namely; the crackdown on opposition, censorship, and unabated corruption. As the pandemic drags on, these three issues are becoming more prominent and require contemplation. Exploration of these issues, figuratively described as “democracy in decline”, gives way to the latter part of this research; the idea that America is exempt from democracy, a condition known as *American exceptionalism*. American exceptionalism, in part, claims that the US is the world’s strongest democracy, global democratic torchbearer, and a government worthy of being imitated. Using the November 2020 US Presidential elections as the litmus test, this research shows that American democracy is far from its righteous claim propagated in International Relations (IR) theory. The impetus is then on students and practitioners of IR to pluralize the field. The study is valid because the term democracy is being used as a wallpaper to disguise illiberal strategies.

Keywords: Democracy in Decline, Covid-19, American Exceptionalism, IR Theory

1. Introduction

Covid-19’s disruption on modern life has resulted in fear, anger, and frustration, which readily translates into resentment (Rosenberg, 2020). The immediate target of this resentment is state governments who “allowed Covid-19 to spiral out of control” and their inability to resolve it. Perceiving these sentiments as attacks on their authority, many governments worldwide have scaled up efforts to consolidate their power via exceptional legal and constitutional responses (IDEA 2021a). Other governments following the trend have simply capitalized on newfound emergency powers to implement what was previously difficult to do.

This consolidation of power has greatly impacted the quality of democracy globally as governments seek more authoritarian measures to contain the epidemic. This was picked up by the *International Crisis Group* (ICG) who warned how the coronavirus epidemic has created “ample room for political leaders to exploit, either to solidify power at home or pursue their interests abroad” (ICG 2020, p. 1). In late 2020, various democracy measuring institutes like *Freedom House*, *Amnesty International*, *Human Rights Watch*, the *Lowy Institute*, the *Brookings Institute* and *Think Global Health*, all released reports remarking the demise of democracy globally. *Freedom House* reported that since the coronavirus outbreak began, democracy and human rights have worsened in 80 countries, with particularly sharp deterioration in struggling democracies and highly repressive states (USGLC, 2021). Democracies no longer constitute the majority of the world's political regimes for the first time in two decades and 48 countries in the world are at a “high risk” of democratic backsliding as a result of the pandemic (Lührmann *et al.* 2020). Traditionally strong democracies as well have felt the pressure. Democracy Reporting International (DRI, 2021) reported its concern that governments are misusing existing laws to restrict the liberty of citizens. The DRI listed only Spain out of twenty-seven EU members as a country of “no concern” when it came to parliamentary or legal oversight of Covid-19 measures.

The decline of democracy is disturbing for four reasons. The first is that while the struggle for democracy can take decades for tangible results to appear, and can be at the cost of thousands of lives and unquantifiable human socio-economic regression, the gains can be dissolved in a fraction of that time. The democratic gains the African National Congress (ANC) made in their 82-year struggle against colonialism and apartheid (1912-1994), are increasingly being reversed as the party faces numerous corruption allegations and trials. In 2020, the global anti-corruption watchdog described the level of corruption in South Africa as “unashamedly brazen” (Transparency International, 2020). Corruption and democracy are reciprocal; corruption thrives where democracy is weak (Rock, 2007; UNODC, 2019).

Secondly, democracy decline can be legal in that Governments may enact laws to equip them with supranational powers. The Enabling Act of 1933 for example, passed by the German Reichstag (Parliament), gave the Nazi's emergency powers to dismantle German democracy on route to the Holocaust. Similarly, South Africa's 2011 “Secrecy Bill”, approved by parliament, contained clauses which protect security agency from leaks, shield politicians from potential embarrassment, and convict journalists with jail time for exposing corruption (Meldrum, 2011; Makoni, 2011). In its totality, this legality can label those who query government action into the political charge of “terrorist” (Baele *et al.* 2017).

Thirdly, democracy decline is disturbing in that the very act can be unknown. Governments can prevent media from reporting issues deemed “sensitive” or completely shut down telecommunications. If independent media fears the government, or a conflict of interests arises amongst media elites, then certain acts might go unreported. India, which refers to itself as the “world's largest democracy” also happens to be the world's leader in internet shutdowns (HRW, 2020). In combating “fake news” in Kashmir, the Indian government have closed down a number of press agencies and in June 2020 released a new Media Policy for the region. Aljazeera (2020) described India's press limitations in the region as a “vendetta”. A further example of how information is censored is seen in October 2020 SARS protest in Nigeria. Despite Nigeria's youthful population of 33 million who are inclined towards social media, few if no videos showcasing security forces brutality circulated on social media. Even the BBC, whose West African branch is located in Nigeria appeared apprehensive in their reporting on the conflict. Eventually, Mwai (2020) published an article regarding the misinformation on the Nigerian SARS protests. The Chomskian rationale here is that documentation recreates history. For example, Neo-Nazis emphasize this notion much to the lamentation of historians; that is, no single document exists which orders the killing of Europe's minorities. If there is no documentation, then the crime never happened.

Fourth and finally, and contrary to popular opinion, when the epidemic eventually ends, democracy will not be magically restored to its pre-Covid stature. According to Mietzner (2019), since 2010, autocrats and democrats alike have been using a wide range of innovative illiberal methods to cement or expand their power. Especially in democracies, however, these techniques

have often been difficult to detect as they are typically packaged as acts of democracy defense, not erosion. As governments become more accustomed to emergency powers, and as these powers become normalized and institutionalized, governments will not relinquish the powers easily. Egypt for example remained in a state of emergency following the 1981 assassination of President Anwar Sadat until the 2011 Arab Spring pro-democracy protests.

The above four reasons not only underline the importance of democracy but show how easily and quickly it can decline. Taking this into consideration, this paper examines three trends globally which contribute to democracy decline namely; the crackdown on opposition, censorship, and unabated corruption. In exploring these three trends, this essay showcases how governments across the globe are using the cover of Covid-19 to turn back the clock on democratic gains so to cement their unchecked power. This discussion contributes to democratic theory, exposing how fragile democracy is, and how it can be devastated in times of pandemics. The discussion is valid given the unexplored gap on the how democratic institutions have caused problems for public health in the coronavirus pandemic (Karabulut *et al.* 2021; Baccini *et al.* 2021; Cepaluni *et al.* 2020; Cukierman, 2021).

Regarding the structure of the paper, the research begins by examining if “democracy is a façade?” In answering this question, what is meant by “democracy in decline” becomes clear. This section is followed by three trends, which highlight the fragile nature of democracy and how it is eroding. The data explored in this section forms the basis of the proceeding analytical section, which explores the idea of American exceptionalism. This debate, urges our understanding of IR theory, more especially, the need to re-think it.

2. Is democracy a façade?

The decline of democracy is best framed in relation to the above question. However, before this is answered, it is necessary to understand what democracy is. The term first appeared in the 5th century BC to denote the political systems existing in the Greek city-states, notably Athens, to mean rule of the people, in contrast to aristocracy meaning rule of an elite. The word is derived from the Greek *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Abraham Lincoln, the 16th US President, provides a popular definition of democracy as government of the people, by the people, and for the people. More recently, democracy has become associated with doing the peoples will or solving the people's problems (Elliot 2020).

Democracy's value as a globally respected concept is seen in the number of states who refer to themselves as Democratic Republics. In 2015, 125 of the world's 195 countries were electoral democracies. A claim exists that strong states are democratic states, and democratic states do not go to war with each other (Cox, 2017; Khadiagala and Nganje, 2015). Democracy's evolution over two millennia has resulted in a multi-faceted conceptualization. In the philosophical sense of idea, it is associated with political equality, freedom, liberty and justice. In economics, it is viewed as the precursor to international co-operation, trade, wealth creation, and growth. In governance, it is the running of a society or a country in a way that rights and freedoms are respected and defended (Munsa, 2006). It is interchangeable with the phrase good governance, which is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (Becker and Raveloson, 2008; Kpundeh, 1992). Thus, sociologists equate democracy to “development” (Rudel, 2011). In the field of international relations (IR), it forms the core of liberal internationalism, responsible for promoting world peace, security, and stability (Khadiagala and Nganje, 2015).

Democracy is also a process and a system. Known as the “democratic process”, it is basis of any valid electoral system. To Katusiimeh (2014), democratic elections are a means of filling public choice by competitive struggle for the peoples' vote. In electing their leadership, people choose representatives to debate and decide on important issues concerning them (Munsa, 2006). As a system, it is built on the arrangement of checks and balances. Checks and balances imply that government must be separated into unique branches to allow democracy to flourish. If one branch interferes in another branch, then a “constitutional crises” develops and the status of democracy becomes questionable. Building on the original Athenian constitution which

separated military magistrates, the *ecclesia*, the *boule*, and the tribunal, the Frenchman Montesquieu (1689-1755), developed *trias politica*, the philosophy that there has to be a strict separation between three independent powers in every nation; one for legislation (parliament), one for administration (the executive), and one for jurisdiction (judiciary) (Ott, 2014).

No matter the different meanings, interpretations, and theories regarding democracy, it is essentially a tool to prevent the easy temptation of tyrannical rule. Plato in ranking the 5 forms of government, placed democracy at 2nd worst. He believed that people were not sufficiently equipped with philosophical grace to legislate and if governance were left in the hands of the ordinary citizen, tyranny, the worst form of government would emerge (Plato, 375). That said, there exists a very fine line where democracy ends and tyranny begins. The Roman poet-philosopher Juvenal (Born 55 AD), satirically posed this dilemma asking *Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?*

Reverting back to the sections opening question; is democracy a façade? Is democracy just a label used gratuitously like in the cases of the authoritarian Democratic Republic of Congo or the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Korea? Schedler (2002) referred to this "labeling" phenomena as the "the menu of manipulation." In claiming democracy, new forms of authoritarianism, which do not fit the class categories of one-party, military, or personal dictatorship have evolved under the guise of democracy. Such states hold elections and tolerate a certain level of pluralism and interparty competition, but at the same time violate the minimal of democratic norms. For example, these states hold elections to celebrate the fruits of electoral legitimacy but the real reason is to cement an unchallengeable hold on power. Rwanda is the perfect example of this. Paul Kagame who has been in power since 1994, took 95% in the 2003 elections, 93% in the 2010 elections, and 98.9% in the 2017 vote. Kagame's *modus operandi* appears in the run up to elections, newspapers are banned, journalist murdered, and opposition figures arrested or disappear. But because Rwanda can hold elections, on time, every few years, against opposition, the government is recognized internationally as a democracy. Kagame remains a respected leader amongst the community of states with no notions of him being a tyrant. Schedler's (2002) conclusion is then profound; we need to abandon misleading labels and take states nondemocratic nature seriously.

As the coronavirus becomes the "new normal", the façade of democracy will become more clear, in effect exposing states non-democratic nature. According to Tonyana (2021), the economic shock of Covid-19 is deepening the income inequality and disparity in living standards. The economic scarring is likely to result from prolonged low economic growth and high unemployment. In developing countries where economic indicators are the measurement of democracy, its retro-gradation requires serious analysis.

3. Three trends

The façade of democracy and its decline is exacerbated by three trends; a crackdown on opposition, censorship, and unabated corruption. Keane (2020) as well as Rapeli and Saikkonen (2020) refer to these worrying trends (and others) as the rise of "New Despotism" in the world. According to Freedom House (2020), the U.S. based nonprofit known for its annual assessment of global democracy, "governments across the world have used the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to limit democracy". The report notes that "what began as a worldwide health crisis has become part of the global crisis for democracy. Governments in every part of the world have abused their powers in the name of public health, seizing the opportunity to undermine democracy and human rights" (Time, 2020). Freedom House (2020) noted that the condition of democracy and human rights has deteriorated in 80 countries around the world as political leaders have taken advantage of the emergency to corrode democratic norms and institutions. Building on aspects of this report, and others, the following section explores the above mentioned trends.

3.1. Crackdown on opposition

Armed with emergency powers, and interpreting these powers as executive takeovers, governments globally are dismantling checks on the executive (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Rapeli and Saikkonen, 2020). According to Tusseau (2011, pp. 501), “emergency justifies that a kind of power-conferring norm be given to an actor, which norm he would not normally enjoy.” In a study by Lührmann and Rooney (2020, p. 3), it was found that “democracies are 75% more likely to erode under a state of emergency than without it.”

One area where governments are maximizing their emergency powers is in the “strategic manipulation of elections” so to prevent the opposition from having a fair chance (Bermeo, 2016; Schedler, 2013). In banning gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, protests, and rally’s, governments have stifled opposition mobilization using special Covid laws to wage fear. Freedom House (2020) notes that national elections in nine countries, and many more subnational votes, were disrupted in some way between January and August 2020, with frequent accusations that decisions on election administration had been politicized. Seven countries moved an election date, including three that did not immediately plan for new elections, though they eventually set new dates. Updated information to reflect the time period February 2020 to June 2021 reveals that 78 countries and territories postponed national and subnational elections due to Covid-19 (IDEA, 2021b).

Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, is a champion of this type of democracy decline. While his own campaign held numerous rallies nationally, opposition groups were prevented from gathering citing Covid-19 concerns. Francis Zaake, an opposition MP, who was previously kidnapped and brutally tortured by security agents, was arrested in mid-2020 after delivering food to his constituents. The government claimed that only it can dole out food aid, and any contravention could result in a charge of murder under special Covid-19 laws (The Economist, 2020). On November 19th, the main opposition candidate, Robert Kyagulanyi (aka Bobi Wine) was arrested for “defying a ban on rallies.” The ban was only applicable to opposition parties as the ruling party held numerous rallies without hindrance. The protests following his arrest led to 45 deaths, many who were shot by plainclothes security agents who fired indiscriminately (Sowetan, 2020). The use of plain clothes security agents is a tactic to instill fear and prevent accountability. In Zimbabwe, the long ruling ZANU-PF enacted “statutory instrument (SI) 77 of 2020” which prevents crowds of 50 people or more from gathering (Ndebele, 2020).

In Sri Lanka, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa dissolved the opposition controlled parliament in March and delayed elections till August. His party eventually won a landslide election adding to fears that he and his brother, former president and current prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, were intent on building an authoritarian regime. The Prime Minister ordered the arrest of anyone who contradicts the government on Covid-19 (Time, 2020). The Central African state of Burundi, informed foreign electoral observers that they would have to isolate on arrival, effectively preventing them from coming as spending two weeks in a Burundian isolation clinic is massively unappealing. Similarly, in Belarus, international and local observers were largely restricted.

In Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen’s government used Covid-19 to bolster its crackdown on opposition. In Azerbaijan, the government used the pretext of breaking quarantine to crack down on opposition political activists. In Ethiopia, Bolivia, and Hong Kong, elections have been postponed indefinitely. There is a risk that electoral delays are being used in a strategic manner to advantage the incumbents (Repucci, 2020).

3.2. Unabated corruption

As transparency declines, corruption thrives. 31% of the *Freedom House* respondents representing 45 states included “corruption and money in politics” among the top three issues they see as most affected by the pandemic response. Across the world, monies were distributed hastily with no oversight or meaningful mechanisms in place to monitor the funds. The rationale for the haste was that the poor and vulnerable required urgent attention. Many states, who never

bothered to build or maintain national hospitals, were now seeking urgent international aid to purchase ventilators. Zimbabwe's infamous Wilkins hospital, notorious for the lack of running water or painkillers, had requested the family of a Covid-19 patient pay \$120,000 to obtain a ventilator (Muronzi, 2020).

One common development globally was the disappearance of supplies and suspicious contracts being awarded. Many companies were quickly registered, and some who were not even registered for medical services, received multi-million dollar contracts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for example, a raspberry farm won a state contract to acquire ventilators. Mass profiteering, unscrupulous behavior and Machiavellian tactics became normalized as face masks which went for \$0.04 on Amazon in January, peaked at \$11.25 in April.

South Africa perfected the art of embezzling Covid-19 relief funds to the extent that the world watchdog on corruption, Transparency International (2020) highlighted this "greed". It is interesting to note that South Africa is in the world's top 15 aid recipients but manages to loose approximately USD4 Billion a year through corruption. In collaboration with the private sector, hundreds of millions of dollars were looted and remain unaccounted for. While the case studies, in even bullet format, could fill the next 30 pages; some cases of the brazen criminal activity include (Medical Brief, 2020);

- Social relief grants meant for the unemployed and the informal business sector being re-directed to personal accounts. Less than half of those eligible received them while others have fraudulently tried to claim them. Monitoring these discrepancies have proven impossible for the government.
- Of the \$750 million allocated for relief measures, approximately half of that is "under investigation."
- Politically connect PPE suppliers making up to 800% profit on PPE equipment sold to the government.
- Finance Ministers Tito Mboweni's repeated observation of how "thieves were waiting at the door", underscores the extent of the corruption, fraud, irregularities, and maladministration.
- The Police, in abusing emergency procurement procedures fraudulently handed out contracts including a \$39 million PPE supply.
- A \$7 million "mistake" in the KZN Provinces purchase of PPE.

Corruption stifles political and economic development, and budgets meant for public goods such as health care, sport and education are decimated. Corruption prevents states from developing democratic structures (Schuster, 2002) and finances criminal enterprises who are keen to destroy democracy.

3.3. Censorship

Propaganda, false news and misinformation abound when a pandemic breaks out, and access to accurate information through a responsible media is more important than ever. However, many governments used the virus as a pretext to introduce disproportionate restrictions to press freedom (Council of Europe 2020). Over-zealous and opportunistic government control strongly affected the freedom of journalists to report the facts (COE, 2021). Independent media in particular were stifled, making accountability difficult, and hampering the dissemination of vital information. 91 of 192 countries (47%) experienced restrictions on the news media as part of the response to Covid-19 (Freedom House, 2020). Censorship is heavily linked to the two previous trends as the crackdown on opposition and unabated corruption become "invisible" (Karabulut *et al.* 2021).

Censorship works in three ways. One involves either a combination of targeting journalists or critics with violence, harassment, intimation, or arrest. In Indonesia, journalists were arrested for criticizing governments' response and in Myanmar, journalists interviewing the Arakan Army, now branded a terrorist organization, have been targets of criminal sanctions

(Crouch, 2020). In the Czech Republic, Serbia and Italy, there were reports of cases of journalists who were prevented from attending press conferences, obtaining information from health authorities or documenting the operations of law enforcement officials. In Turkey, several journalists were detained in reprisal for their reporting on the pandemic. In Slovenia, a journalist who filed an information request about the measures adopted by the government to face the pandemic has been the target of a smear campaign by media close to the political party leading the government coalition. In Egypt, health workers who raised concerns were attacked by the media and arrested. Human Rights Watch (2020) noted that in Kazakhstan, there was an increase in the persecution of civic activists and political opposition for expressing their critical opinions on social media or disseminating information about human rights violations, including through the initiation of criminal cases. In Bangladesh, one respondent noted his caution in publically criticizing his governments Covid-19 response (Freedom House, 2020). South East Asian citizens have been targeted with criminal charges for criticizing the government's handling of the crises (Freedom House, 2020).

A second way censorship works is when governments exert control over content. This is achieved through revoking media's operating licenses, suspending printing of newspapers, denying press credentials, and limiting independent questioning at press conferences. In Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina, amendments, decrees, and legislative proposals to prevent the dissemination of "harmful information" was invoked. In Armenia, a number of newspapers and websites had to delete some information, following the adoption of strict rules prohibiting the publication of information of a medical and epidemiological nature about the virus outbreak, which is not fully consistent with official sources. In Hungary and Russia, there was practically no government criticism (Rapeli and Saikkonen, 2020) and in Belarus, the government propagated blatant lies while an information blackout went unchallenged (Freedom House, 2020).

Thirdly, it can prevent the spread of impartial information by blocking websites, articles, or social media posts. In legislating on "fake news", governments are able to suppress information which is not "mainstream." Government restrictions on free speech and criticism of the government were imposed in at least 72 states. In Romania, a decree allowing authorities to remove content and block websites where this content provides "false information" regarding the evolution of Covid-19 was introduced. In Kyrgyzstan, medical workers who spoke openly about the problems they encountered were forced to apologize and recant their claims on video. In South Africa, criticism of China's role in Covid-19 disappeared along with any critical thought, which was not aligned with mainstream media. In Nigeria, Uganda, and Ethiopia, the respective governments blocked social media when civil unrest loomed.

To Rapeli and Saikkonen (2020), many observers have characterized the Covid-19 crisis as also being the biggest disinformation crisis we have ever faced. As the actors behind it acquire more resources and learn from their successes and failures, and as more "innovation" is piled on our current systems of ubiquitous information, we are likely to see a continuing evolution of disinformation strategies and tactics.

4. Analysis: American exceptionalism

Analyzing IR phenomena tends to incorporate a critique of the developing world with a stronger magnification. Barrat-Brown (1995) described this as the dreaming up of essentialist discourses, which according to Muchie (2000), reduces analysis to character and culture. This narrative led Dietrich (2008) to call the study of IR "an ethno-science."

It was Waeber (1998), who brought attention to how the study of IR is dominated by ideas and theories stemming from American schools of thought. Smith (2000) purported that the theories methodologies, and epistemological frameworks of IR were all Western and specifically American centered. We see this in how the flow of ideas are one way, from America to the rest of the world. As a heavily insular field, IR theory is dominated by American voices, citing Americans most often, while paying little attention to scholarship produced elsewhere (Dietrich, 2008). More recently, Smith (2009), Odoom and Andrews (2017), Maliniak *et al.* (2018), and Zondi (2018) have all argued that IR is "American Relations" or "American social science".

This understanding can be juxtaposed against the idea of democracy in decline. How is that America, the self-appointed torchbearer of global democracy, and which has enforced its version of democracy upon the world at the expense of unforeshadowed destruction, is not open to the same critique usually reserved when describing IR events? The tone, vocabulary, and condescending nature of the language deployed by many of the agencies in criticizing attacks on democracy were not afforded to America's own democracy. The November 2020 US election showcases this point and makes a case for American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism is a view of the US, that the country sees its history as inherently different and superior from that of other nations. Rose (1989) noted that most American historians endorse exceptionalism, suggesting that: America marches to a different drummer. Its uniqueness is explained by any or all of a variety of reasons: history, size, geography, political institutions, and culture. Explanations of the growth of government in Europe are not expected to fit American experience, and vice versa.

Thibodeau (2017) makes many references to American exceptionalism in his description of the events at the Waco siege of 1993. To Thibodeau, while Americans know that massacres, propaganda, censorship, infanticide, and tyrannical governance are daily norms outside of America, they cannot fathom that such can happen in America, to Americans, by Americans. That is, anti-democratic practices are incapable of occurring in the US and this notion of "incapability" is instrumental in creating the powerful façade of American democracy.

As witnessed in the November 2020 US elections, there was no debate on whether anti-democratic practices happened. The entire elections are framed as the election for global democracy. In his campaign, Joe Biden promised to rejuvenate democracy across the world. Many reports and videos of electoral observers blocked were brushed aside because such does not happen in America. The argument that the mail-in ballot system is 100% secure from fraud and is unquestionable further highlights this. State-run and heavily centralized US media portray themselves as impartial, fair, and without an agenda, though this is far from the case. Notions of what constitutes "fake news" are ridiculed without real analysis. These sentiments were captured in what former President Obama had to say about the elections; "claiming fraud undermines democracy."

Unable to recognize the contradictions, attempts to delineate where Plato's democracy ends and tyranny begins becomes impossible. What is clear is that US power remains in the hands of a relatively small elite. While divided among themselves along more progressive and conservative lines, these elites are united in their appreciation of democratic governance, the protections it affords, and of course, the benefits they enjoy. Consequently, they have deployed their power over nomination processes to sideline political figures who threaten their "democratic processes" (Rosenberg, 2020). Their control of the mass media and education institutions helps to guide the national political discussion and frame issues. The issues and people they do not agree with are labeled "anti-democratic" at best and "terrorists" at worst. The result is a spectator democracy.

Democracy then from an IR perspective requires serious re-thinking. If the global standard on democracy practices a very skewed form of democracy while preaching to the world on what democracy is, then democracy's general understanding is a façade. Democracy can never fully develop and grow if governments across the world continue to practice a democracy based on the American standard. Covid-19 has exposed democracy's fragility for what it is. New ideas and thoughts, especially from a decolonized view are required to take the study of IR further.

5. Conclusion

The decline in democracy brings with it a decline in socio-economics, which are accompanied by more human rights violations, more disinformation, more corruption, and less toleration for plural societies. In cementing their power, executive power becomes centralized and maximized. Prior to Covid-19, democracy has been on the decline for 14 years in a row, in both the established and more fragile democratic systems. Covid-19 has made the decline worse (Rapeli and Saikkonen, 2020) and if not questioned early on, emergency powers will be entrenched much to

the mis-alignment of democracy. As the case of America shows, this is very troubling. Effectively, states are masquerading as democracies while disseminating illiberal strategies.

The authors recommend that more analysis of the American democratic model be heavily scrutinized instead of gladly accepting American hegemony and its ideas as universally valid. Furthermore, IR theory developed and located in the global south need be studied, theorized and disseminated so that it reaches a point where it is a solid counter-narrative. As noted by Acharya and Buzan (2007), theory is simplifying reality. In Africa in particular, democracy has evolved into its own hybrid models, which are proving successful. With the right financing, institutionalization, theory development, methodology, and training, African IR theory can develop.

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