

Democratic Governance in Taiwan

This book employs a policy-based approach to examine the emerging governance structure in Taiwan, one of several countries in East Asia where democratic consolidation is firmly established.

Each chapter provides a detailed investigation of reforms that have helped to strengthen Taiwan's democracy in such areas as elections, civil service recruitment, economic policy, social policy, environmental protection, civil rights, response to the COVID-19 pandemic, civil-military relations, and foreign and mainland China policy.

As a study of Taiwan's democratic governance, this book will be of interest to students and scholars of Asian politics, comparative politics, democracy, and Taiwan.

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Democratic Governance in Taiwan

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Democratic Governance in Taiwan

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and Robert Henry Cox**

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8 When Democracy Meets the COVID-19 Pandemic

Taiwan's Experience

Wei-Ting Yen and Li-Yin Liu

Introduction

COVID-19 was and remains an exogenous shock to the world. Confronted with the same invisible enemy, countries develop different approaches in handling such crises. One vibrant policy debate revolving around the COVID-19 pandemic is whether authoritarianism is more effective in containing the spread of the coronavirus. The claim that one regime type is superior to the other oversimplifies the nature of the crisis as well as the nuanced differences between different forms of government. It also oversimplifies governments' governance responsibility during dark times (Stivers 2008; Stivers 2021).

The governance challenge facing different forms of government lies in what different regime types identify as core values and what they do to reduce the broader damage the pandemic may cause. Democracy and non-democracy differ in where power resides and how authority is derived. As such, democracy is not necessarily superior to their nondemocratic counterparts, and vice versa. They simply possess distinctive features during crisis governance. To fully understand the effects of regime types on the COVID-19 response, it would be more productive to focus on the process rather than the outcome of the crisis.

In this chapter, we identify three governance strengths associated with democracies when coping with COVID-19 from the perspective of political science and public administration. First, vertical accountability prompts democracies to govern the public health crisis in a fashion that takes into account civil liberty protection and individual rights. Democratic governments may not combat the public health crisis in the most efficient way; yet democratic governments are incentivized to minimize the extent to which individual rights are infringed during the crisis. Second, democratic governments resort to persuasion instead of coercion to enhance citizen compliance. Transparency, communication, and persuasion matter for manufacturing compliance in democracy. In the communication and persuasion process, democracy not only needs to provide transparent information and clear policy directions, but it also must receive criticism and questions from the public or the opposition party. These dissenting voices can create a feedback loop that guards against policies deviating from long-term public interests.

Third, civil society plays an important role in democracy during a public health crisis. An active and mature civil society is pivotal to effective crisis responses (Yuen et al. 2021). For one thing, an open society helps strengthen the vertical accountability mechanism in democracy, enhancing individual rights protection and government responsiveness. For another, a strong civil society, through coproduction, can supplement government measures to make policy implementation more comprehensive.

We also identify three governance challenges facing democracies during the public health crisis. First, fake news and misinformation is already a challenge to contemporary democracies. In times of uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the misinformation problem can be more pronounced and amplified because the general public panics, seeking more information and certainty. Second, electoral competition creates different incentive structures for elected officials in democracies from that of professional bureaucrats. Such incongruity may create political tension which is unproductive for crisis governance. Third, social trust and societal consensus are the prerequisite for successful democratic governance during crises. Absence of these components would offset the advantages of democratic governance during crises and, in the worst-case scenario, make democracy an inferior form of government to their nondemocratic counterparts.

We examine these democratic governance features in Taiwan's context, from early 2020 to June of 2021 when this chapter was written. As a vibrant democracy, Taiwan's handling of COVID-19 has been relatively successful. Its preemptive early responses protected the island from major COVID-19 outbreaks until late April 2021. Under the Taiwanese democratic governance, civil society was keen to fill the government's service gap during COVID-19 and ensure government accountability. Citizens' compliance is also high due to regular and consistent communication channels between the government and the society. Taiwan's experience demonstrates that democratic governance is essential for ensuring civil liberty protection, government accountability, and voluntary compliance during public health crises like COVID-19. The 2021 outbreak forced the government to take measures that are more drastic than any COVID-19 response actions taken before.¹ The outbreak intensified the conflict between elected officials and technocrats as well as the misinformation problem. These experiences are great examples to show the governance benefits and dilemmas that democracies are facing.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of the COVID-19 crisis in Taiwan. In sections "Governing COVID-19 in Democracy: The Strength" and "Governing COVID-19 in Democracy: The Weakness", we discuss the crisis governance strengths and challenges that democracy faces, and we use this framework to evaluate Taiwan's COVID-19 experiences. We then end the chapter with a brief summary of the features and challenges of democratic governance of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Taiwan

Taiwan responded to the coronavirus quicker than most countries in the world. Taiwan's COVID-19 response started before China officially informed the World

Health Organization (WHO) about the threats of the novel-coronavirus on December 31, 2019. Unlike many countries which started to react only after cases emerged within their national border, Taiwan quickly implemented intervention measures in early January before any cases were detected. On January 2, 2020, Taiwan started inflight and border screening. The first COVID-19 case arrived from Wuhan, China, on January 21, almost three weeks after the government's first mitigation measure. The government also activated the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) on January 20, 2020, one day before the first case was detected. The CECC oversees resource and response coordination at the ministerial level, enabling the government's swift action in mobilizing resources and inter- and intra-agency coordination.²

Taiwan's centralized institutional design, which partially contributed to Taiwan's quick response, is SARS's direct legacy (Yen 2020). After the regulatory failure of SARS, Taiwan created the National Health Command Center (NHCC) in 2005. Since then, the NHCC has been the centralized command point for public health emergencies. The CECC is one of NHCC's subunits. The CECC is composed of experts from different fields with the goal to streamline government responses during an epidemic crisis. Besides the institutional recalibration, Taiwan also modified the Communicable Disease Control Act (CDC Act) after SARS. The revised CDC Act provides the necessary legal framework upon which the government can act swiftly. The law grants the CECC the authority to coordinate central and local governments in resource mobilization and allocation. It also grants the CECC authority to impose large-scale epidemic mitigation measures (e.g., social distancing or mask wearing).

Taiwan focused on border control, contact tracing, targeted testing, mask mandate, public sanitation education, and the strict 14-day quarantine for incoming travelers. These measures successfully kept the virus at bay for over a year in Taiwan. In April 2021, the accumulated cases were 873–768 imported and 66 locally infected cases. No lockdown or shelter in place requirements were ever issued on the island.

Taiwan's biggest COVID-19 threat began in late April 2021. An Indonesian pilot of a cargo aircraft from Taiwan tested positive on April 20, 2021, in Australia, and the case was reported to the CECC on April 23, 2021. Through contact tracing, the CECC detected a local infection cluster centered around a hotel's employees and contract workers near the airport in early May 2021. The hotel was found violating regulations by hosting quarantined pilots without the government's permission. This local infection cluster quickly spread to the hostess teahouses in the Wanhua District in Taipei City, which eventually led to the 2021 outbreak in Taiwan.

To contain the spread of COVID-19, the CECC raised the epidemic warning to Level 2 and implemented related restrictions and measures on May 11, 2021 (seven locally infected cases were detected on that day). When 180 cases were confirmed on May 15, the CECC raised the emergency level to Level 3 for Taipei and New Taipei city; related restrictions and measures were also implemented. On May 19, the Level 3 alert was expanded to the whole country, and the warning was extended from May 28 to July 27, 2021. In late May 2021, the number of daily confirmed cases in Taiwan reached its peak (597 cases on a 7-day average). The

confirmed locally infected cases have started to decrease since then. By the end of July, the daily confirmed cases decreased to fewer than 20.

Governing COVID-19 in Democracy: The Strength

Democracy is characterized by vertical accountability and horizontal accountability. Vertical accountability refers to the mechanisms through which citizens can hold the government officials accountable and politicians are incentivized to be responsive to voters' preferences and demands (e.g., elections, referendums, and nongovernment organizations). Horizontal accountability refers to the institutional designs through which different government agencies can check and balance power and hold other government agencies accountable. Democracy, if defined by its minimal definition, is about whether a competitive election exists, which means whether the vertical accountability mechanism exists. Beyond the procedure definition, there are other components scholars consider beneficial for democratic governance and the overall quality of democracy. These democratic components include freedom of speech, freedom of association, media independence, the fundamental protection of individual rights, etc. The quality of democracy is not homogenous across countries, and the more democratic components a country possesses, the higher quality of such democracy.

In this section, we identify three crisis governance features associated with democracies. In brief, the vertical accountability mechanism inherited in competitive elections incentivizes democratic leaders to take the public's preferences into account, even during a public health crisis. As such, leaders in democracies are more likely to minimize basic human rights violations in the name of crisis management. The vertical accountability and freedom of information also prompt democracy to use less coercion and more persuasion to manufacture citizen compliance. Last, a vibrant civil society can be a plus for crisis management under democracies. We discuss each feature in detail and apply the features in Taiwan's context in the following sections.

Minimizing Civil Rights Infringement

All countries are confronted with the trade-off between "lives and livelihoods" under the COVID-19 crisis. Yet, democracy is confronted with an additional trade-off between health and basic individual liberty (Cheibub et al. 2020, 1; Amat et al. 2020). Because democracies must appeal to what the citizens want, the concern of individual liberty prompts democracies to respond in a way that protects civil liberty when drafting the COVID-19 response.

However, trying to adhere to the democratic principle does not mean that democracies would never impose stringent measures that violate individual rights (Stasavage 2020). After all, democracy is not the only factor shaping COVID-19 measure stringency. Other factors, such as state capacity, can play a role, too (Greer et al. 2020; Price-Smith 1999; Yen et al. 2022).

What sets democracies apart from their nondemocratic counterparts is whether the level of measure stringency is proportional to the severity of the crisis. Democratic governments must constantly justify the measures they implement. It is hard to sustain a stringent measure without adequate legal and moral justifications. Authoritarian regimes, in contrast, are less constrained in their power vertically and horizontally and hence can maintain measures at a stringent level for longer periods of time. Moreover, when it is necessary to implement extraordinary measures, democratic governments are incentivized to clearly plan and state how they attempt to minimize infringement to individual rights.

There are several indicators showing Taiwan's upholding of this democratic principle. Between March and December 2020, Taiwan was ranked with almost zero violation of democratic standards in their emergency response, together with other democracies such as Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia (Pandemic Backsliding 2021).

Moreover, with respect to the correlation between measure stringency and crisis severity, Taiwan shows a higher correlation between the two. Authoritarian regimes were more likely to take drastic measures rapidly and remain at the high level of stringency for a long time compared to democracies. Based on the COVID-19 Government Response Tracker by the University of Oxford (COVID-19 Government Response Tracker 2021), the stringency level in Taiwan remained around 25 before its 2021 outbreak. When the 2021 outbreak occurred, its stringency level increased to 50.46 on May 15, 2021, and to 74.07 on May 19, 2021, but dropped to 68.62 on May 24, 2021. On July 7, 2020, the stringency level of Taiwan further dropped to 56.48. On the other hand, the stringency level of China's COVID-19 related restriction increased from 44.91 (on January 23, 2020) to 69.91 (on January 25, 2020) in two days when its accumulated cases went over 1,000 and again to 77.31 (on January 30, 2020) when the accumulated cases exceeded 10,000. After that, despite that the official reported cases decreased, its stringency level was kept between 63.43 and 81.94. A similar trend can be observed in Singapore. When its accumulated cases hit 1,000, its stringency level increased from 36.11 (April 1, 2020), to 45.37 (April 2, 2020), and to 76.85 (April 7, 2020) in less than a week. The high stringency level in Singapore remained until June 20, 2020 (dropped to 50.93).

In addition, in Taiwan, even during the 2021 outbreak, Taiwan's government was reluctant to put the country under a complete lockdown (i.e., Level 4 alert). Whenever the government strengthened the stringency level, it also clearly stated the expected date to relax the restriction. Democratic governments must constantly justify the measures they implement. It is hard to sustain a stringent measure without moral justification.

Compliance Through Persuasion Than Coercion

The second governance feature associated with democracy is how the democratic government makes citizens comply with COVID-19-related restrictions. In

a public health crisis, nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) only work when the majority of citizens choose to comply. Most NPIs (e.g., testing, quarantine, and lockdown) require more than government actions. Citizen participation in transmission prevention is equally essential and in some cases, even more important than the government regulations themselves (Zottarelli et al. 2012; Ibuka et al. 2010).

In authoritarian regimes, compliance is mostly achieved through top-down coercion and pure authority. Authority tools and sanctions are the primary means for social control. In contrast, merely relying on a top-down control approach is not enough to generate effective outcomes in democracy. With the emphasis on individual liberty, compliance in democracies heavily rely on voluntary cooperation and participation (Liu et al. 2021). To this end, compliance in democratic regimes requires more persuasion than coercion. To successfully persuade the public to cooperate, democratic governments need to be transparent with the public about the crisis risk and to increase citizen's understanding of policy intentions and policy contents to reduce noncompliance caused by information deficiency and disagreement.

One positive attribute of democracy is freedom of speech and information transparency. Compared to authoritarian regimes, there is less incentive for a democratic regime to keep information from its people.³ Information transparency is the first step to communicate with the public during crises. Being transparent with crisis information is essential for citizens to rightly evaluate the looming threat, which is the foundation for citizen compliance with government regulatory measures.

Moreover, in a democratic society, the communication between the government and the society usually adopts a two-way rather than a one-way top-down approach. From the public administration's perspective, two-way communication is crucial in public health crisis management to increase the credibility of government-released information and the public's policy understanding. This type of two-way communication creates a dialog platform between the government and citizens to share accurate crisis-oriented information and allow both sides to jointly create information credibility based on mutual feedback (Palenchar and Heath 2007). Through this dialog, the government is incentivized to explain the intention behind policies to persuade citizens. This process improves citizens' understanding of government-initiated measures, which in turn increases their willingness to comply with these policies voluntarily (Renn 2014) and even contribute to the service delivery during the pandemic (Steen and Brandsen 2020).

Taiwan set up its information infrastructure very early, before the COVID-19 crisis received global attention. Since January 21, 2020, when the first case was detected, the CECC has been doing daily press conferences to enhance information transparency. It was not until February 2020 that the WHO called on countries to provide rapid, regular, and transparent communication to citizens (World Health Organization 2020). The routine in the daily press conference is that the CECC reports the newly added cases, explains the source of infection, releases the footprint of confirmed cases (with personal identity hidden), announces new activated measures, and educates the public about what needs to be done.

This daily conference serves multiple functions. First, frequent release of COVID-19 related data provides the public with essential information to gauge the overall crisis. The information keeps the public connected to the continuing crisis that the public may not have perceived in their daily lives. Staying aware of the COVID-19 crisis is the necessary step to generate citizens' voluntary compliance.

Releasing up-to-date and correct data is essential but not sufficient for a government to be transparent. Government information needs to be easily understood by the mass public to achieve true transparency (Etzioni 2010; Mansbridge 2009). Due to population heterogeneity, the CECC utilizes visual aids (e.g., cardboards with visual explanations) and real-time sign language to distribute information in more accessible forms. These mechanisms are present to ensure that crisis communication can be comprehended by diverse audiences, which in turn reduces the possibility of noncompliance resulting from information deficiency (Yen and Liu 2021).

Second, explaining policy intentions has been found to improve policy understanding to reduce noncompliance resulting from information deficiency and disagreement (Porumbescu et al. 2017). The CECC in Taiwan has always explained policy intentions to the public very carefully during the press conferences, attempting to educate the public by providing user-friendly explanations. For example, back in August 2020, the Taiwanese society was debating about the necessity of widespread mass testing. The CECC and the then vice-president explained the danger of Type 1 error (false-positive testing results) and Type 2 error (false-negative testing results) in the daily press conference's detailing. Whether or not it had any impact, it illustrates the high level of transparency and the attempt to increase citizen voluntary compliance based on policy understanding rather than coercion.

Third, the two-way communication mechanisms built in the daily press conference further improves transparency and policy understanding. In the daily press conference, the majority of time is occupied with Question and Answer (Q&A) time for the journalists. The Q&A time is also considered an accountability mechanism to ensure the government released all information because withholding information becomes difficult under this daily scrutiny. In addition, journalists can also be seen as the bridge between the public and the Taiwan CDC by raising public concerns during the Q&A sessions. Some of the questions raised by journalists encouraged the Taiwan CDC to plan its action comprehensively.

In summary, instead of ensuring citizen compliance through top-down coercive control, the Taiwanese government has been utilizing transparent and two-way communication channels to persuade the public of the COVID-19 risk and the measures to be taken. These measures balance the need for crisis management (i.e., mass compliance from the public) and democratic principles (civil liberty) through encouraging citizen's voluntary cooperation.

Active Civil Society Involvement

The third feature associated with democratic crisis governance is the level of civil society inclusion in crisis response. Democracies usually feature stronger and more open civil societies. Civil society plays a vital role in influencing the nature of

a country's crisis response. For one thing, the government's commitment to individual rights protection can be further strengthened by civil society. During a crisis, the government may harm individual rights more than it needs to. Civil society organizations play the watchdog role in correcting government's wrongdoings. Dissenting opinions and skepticism from civil society is a form of vertical accountability. The existence of a strong civil society can help minimize the harm a government creates and recalibrate its crisis response to a moving equilibrium. For another, a strong civil society can also collaborate with the government in facilitating policy implementation and public service provision. During a crisis, it is unlikely for any government to adopt measures that are comprehensive and address the needs for all citizens when a lot of measures and regulations are adopted on short notice. In this case, civil society can serve as a gap filler to top up the policy gap left behind by the government through citizen-initiated coproduction.

In Taiwan, civil society organizations diligently play the watchdog role in overseeing the government during the crisis. The constant oversight from its civil society forces the government to justify the measures they take legally and morally and explain how individual rights protection can be maximized in the process. One prominent example of this oversight-responsiveness is contact tracing. Contact tracing is considered one necessary measure to stop the spread of the virus. Countries like Australia and Taiwan have been utilizing mobile phone applications (e.g., Taiwan Social Distancing app) to create a surveillance network to fight against COVID-19. However, the measure is controversial because citizens' whereabouts can be monitored by the government (Greenleaf and Kemp 2021). Civil society organizations, such as the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, constantly expressed concerns over contact tracing-related measures and mobile applications, urging the government to respond to the privacy concern. In response, the CECC, during their daily conferences and through multiple channels, emphasized that neither the government nor the app developer has access to the Bluetooth-powered contact tracing records, and the records are automatically deleted after 14 days (Wu 2021; Taiwan Centers for Disease Control 2021a). Another example is that, during the 2021 outbreak, the media revealed that the government traced and marked people in the Wanhua area (the main outbreak area in Taipei) as "high risk" on their national health insurance cards. This action received several criticisms from its civil society, forcing the CECC to be more transparent in explaining the app's intentions. In summary, the open dialog between civil society and government enhances the accountability mechanism and prevents the government from drastically undermining civil liberty in the name of public interest.

Besides the watchdog role, Taiwan's civil society has been energized and fired up for collaborative governance during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, under various scenarios, the leaderless "civic hacker" group, G0v, voluntarily collaborated with the government to present and communicate COVID-19-related information with the public in a more effective way. For example, at the beginning of the crisis, the government centralized mask distribution and launched a name-based distribution system. Citizens panicked over limited mask supply and queued up for long hours for masks. To solve the problem, civil hackers were

quickly mobilized, through the GOv platform, and designed a free mask tracker app within a few days. With the trackers, citizens can easily find how many masks are distributed to different locations, immediately solving the long queue issue (Nabben 2020). The civil hacker group made a similar vaccine availability tracker in May 2021 and made vaccine information accessible (i.e., which hospitals still have open slots) to the public. Civic hackers can be quickly mobilized, thanks to the digital democracy infrastructure that is already in place prior to the pandemic. The notion of digital democracy, of which citizens can freely participate in the governance process and promotes two-way communication, has been embraced and promoted by Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Digital Minister (Taylor and Tang 2020). Such a collaborative network becomes effective during a crisis and can recruit hacker citizens to co-produce with the government for disease prevention actively and more efficient information communication.

Governing COVID-19 in Democracy: The Weakness

Although some attributes of democracies can be beneficial for coping with the COVID-19 crisis, this crisis also brings up several democratic dilemmas, such as the trade-off between public health and civil liberty, between democratic procedural and efficiency, and between technocratic governance and political ideologies (Amat et al. 2020). Similar to other democracies, the Taiwanese government also encounters some of governance dilemmas under democracies.

In this section, we discuss three challenges for democracies during crisis management: the misinformation problem, the tension between elected officials and professional bureaucrats, and the social trust issue, and lack thereof.

Democratic Dilemma on Misinformation Management

The COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a massive “infodemic,” of which there is an overabundance of misinformation (World Health Organization 2020). Information related to the public health crisis is highly technical (e.g., basic reproduction number). When highly technical information cannot be accessed and comprehended by the public, the public is likely to turn their attention to those easy-to-understand misleading statements or fake news. During a crisis with a lot of unknown uncertainties like COVID-19, it also becomes easier for attackers to launch cognitive warfare and spread misinformation and disinformation. Misleading statements may create panic and decrease trust in government-initiated measures, which in turn lower the willingness for citizen participation and coproduction in containing the spread of the virus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the threats of misinformation have been real, undermining people's trust toward government-released information.

The challenge of misinformation is more pronounced in democratic societies where freedom of speech is an individual right. Despite the fact that democracy favors information transparency, the overloading of misinformation can undermine information credibility. Misleading statements can be top-down (from

politicians) and bottom-up (Brennen et al. 2020). When politicians are concerned with elections, they are motivated to provide election-oriented information, which may be misleading. Politicians' inaccurate statements often undermine professional bureaucrats' efforts, which can lead to crisis communication failure (Hatcher 2020).

The Taiwan government utilizes several institutional and noninstitutional mechanisms to decrease the threats of misinformation. Institutionally, based on the CDC Act, people who spread misinformation or rumors related to communicable diseases shall be fined up to NT\$3,000,000 (around US\$10,000) or up to three years in prison. To prevent top-down misleading information and to increase information credibility, all COVID-19-related information has been centrally provided by CECC or the former vice-president, a prominent epidemiologist, since January 2020. Every member of the CECC team is responsible for one area of policy response (e.g., hospital capacity and border control) as well as the communication of that policy aspect. When the information is highly technical, the CECC invites experts to address specific concerns. The CECC also invites different ministries to the daily conference to explain policy measures related to their specific ministries. For example, during the 2021 outbreaks, the government decided to suspend all in-person learning. Instead of letting the CECC director make the announcement, the Minister of Education was invited to the conference to announce the policy in the daily press conference. Delegation of communication responsibility enhances not only information accuracy but also the public authority.

Noninstitutionally, the Taiwan CDC created an official Line account, Taiwan-V-Watch, to correct misinformation (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control 2021b). Moreover, Taiwan's Digital Minister Audrey Tang utilizes the "humor over rumor" strategy (Mahdawi 2021), using memes to cope with misinformation. In other words, instead of fact checking for the public, the government has been utilizing multiple communication channels to make accurate information available for the public to cope with misinformation through open government rather than merely depending on coercion.

In a society, vulnerable groups (less educated or lower social economic status) are more likely to experience information deficiencies and fall into the trap of misinformation. They often lack access to information, mistrust official announcements, and are surrounded by rumors and misinformation (Clark-Ginsberg and Petrun Sayers 2020). These communication gaps exacerbate the risk facing the vulnerable groups during a public health crisis. The government tries to combat this gap by releasing the official Outbreak Prevention Works Instruction, in which the collaboration between the government and noninstitutional actors (e.g., religious groups and community volunteer groups) explains policy content to and correct misinformation for vulnerable groups, as these civil society organizations have more access and are more likely to gain trust from the vulnerable groups (Clark-Ginsberg and Petrun Sayers 2020). These mechanisms help reduce the negative aspect of crisis communication (misinformation) and increase the positive side effect (citizen's voluntary compliance).

While Taiwan initiated a series of mechanisms to cope with misinformation and rumors, misinformation remained a big challenge for crisis governance. For example, during the 2021 outbreak, vaccine purchase and supply dominated the political debate. Despite the CECC's effort to provide accurate information, misinformation about vaccine spread over social media and mainstream media, evoking public anger toward the central government and, in turn, decreasing the public's willingness to be vaccinated.

The Tension Between Elected Officials and Professional Bureaucrats

In democracy, politicians are subject to periodic elections to continue their political lives. Often, to demonstrate responsiveness to one's own constituency, politicians are more short-sighted and strategically aim for political gains that can be aligned with the electoral cycle. Bureaucrats (especially technocrats), on the other hand, do not share the same time horizons. Technocrats answer to the executive leader (i.e., the president or the prime minister), and they are delegated to formulate and implement policies. Even though politically appointed technocrats are indirectly responsive to voters (because the top executive leader is elected), they are directly subordinate to the executive leader. As such, technocrats, to some extent, are free from the electoral pressure and the need to make policy decisions with quicker electoral gains. Periodic electoral competition incentivizes elected officials in democracies to behave in a way that can be different from the interest of professional bureaucrats. The gap may create political tension futile for crisis governance. For instance, elected officials may be less keen on passing measures limiting their constituents' freedom. Professional technocrats may want to impose a regulation elected politicians find hard to convince their voters with, etc.

In Taiwan, the tension between elected officials at the local level and professional bureaucrats at the central government escalated during the 2021 outbreak. When COVID-19 first hit Taiwan in early 2020, Taiwan had just finished its presidential election. At the time, elected politicians had no immediate incentive to stand on the opposite side of CECC's professional bureaucrats. However, when the 2021 outbreak took place, it gave local elected leaders incentives to utilize the opportunity for campaign purposes by criticizing CECC's actions. Due to electoral concerns, professional bureaucrats are asked to be hyperresponsive and experience bureaucratic bashing from elected officials (Meier 1997; Olsen 2005). For example, some mayors campaigned about purchasing vaccines without the CECC's intervention. Some would like to start mass testing in their own counties. Others were asking the bureaucrats in CECC to be hyperresponsive to local governments' constituencies. Although these actions may not be realistic, they reflect expectations and form ideological divides in the public. Although authoritarian governments may also experience the tension between local and central government, the electoral competition in democracy can sometimes add more obstacles to crisis management.

Shaky Social Trust and Consensus

The more fundamental crisis governance challenge is the lack of social trust and societal consensus, both of which are the prerequisite for successful crisis management. As mentioned earlier, elected politicians in democracies are subject to the incentives of winning elections and hence are responsive to what voters want. Where there is no consensus in terms of how voters perceive the crisis, what voters want, or when voters of different backgrounds want different things, the political tension between professional technocrats and elected officials is merely a reflection of social distrust and societal disagreement. The societal consensus, and lack thereof, can delay a democracy's response to a public health crisis like COVID-19. While autocracies can impose strict policies swiftly and unilaterally, democratic regimes without clear societal consensus would have to “wait for observable signs of the danger in order to persuade people that measures restricting liberties and causing economic harm are necessary” (Cheibub et al. 2020, 11). In many cases, democracies wait too long to react, making democracies look inferior to their nondemocratic counterparts.

Moreover, trust toward the government during a pandemic is essential for containing the spread of COVID-19. Citizens' willingness to comply with regulations is determined by whether they believe their government has good intentions behind the adopted measures and has the capacity to cope with the crisis (Levi and Stoker 2000; Siegrist and Zingg 2014). However, their level of trust in the government is dependent on perceived government performance. They also tend to hold the government accountable based on its policy performance, but often-times policy decisions are influenced by multiple stakeholders that are invisible to the public. When the level of the COVID-19 crisis increases, the public is more likely to feel dissatisfied with the government's performance regardless of the difficulties of policy decisions. Although authoritarian governments may also receive the same perception from their citizens, public compliance in authoritarian regimes is not as sensitive to the change of trust in government as democratic regimes.

In Taiwan, the 2021 outbreak destabilized the public's trust in CECC's decision-making. Two biggest criticisms the Taiwan CECC received during the outbreak were low capacity of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests and insufficient vaccines. From the public's perspective, the CECC had more than a year to boost PCR test capacity to start mass testing on the border and should have purchased and stored more vaccines. However, these policies are tied to multiple stakeholders. While the PCR capacity was concerning, medical and laboratory groups also hesitated to include non-medical professions in the PCR testing process to ensure professional integrity, which prolonged the process. The vaccine purchased procedure is also both highly technical and political. Overall, the dissatisfaction from the public may lead to the decrease of public trust in government, which in turn decreases its willingness to comply with COVID-19 policies.

Conclusion

This chapter identifies three crisis governance features and three governance challenges associated with democracy during a public health crisis. To fully grasp

the differences of regime types on public health crisis management, we argue that attention should be turned to the process instead of the outcome of epidemic control. Because of the vertical accountability mechanisms and the freedom of speech and association, democracies possess different crisis response styles than their authoritarian counterparts. Civil liberty and individual rights are taken into account by political leaders in a democracy, and information transparency and communication are crucial for getting the buy-in from the public to comply with the policy measures. Civil society also plays a crucial role in crisis management in democracy. However, the features democracies are proud of can be a double-edged sword and create unique challenges for democracies, too. Vertical accountability may generate two sets of political elites with different time horizons and people to which they want to be responsive, creating room for friction during crisis management. Freedom of information may also make democracies more vulnerable to the attack of misinformation, which in turn erodes social trust during a crisis. When social trust and consensus become issues during a public health crisis, the society will likely disagree on the nature of the crisis to the measures necessary to combat the crisis. The problem of societal consensus, and the lack thereof, may result in democracies performing even worse than authoritarian regimes in crisis management.

Notes

- 1 The first COVID-19 outbreak in Taiwan took place in late April of 2021.
- 2 For example, Taiwan's early success can be attributed to its mask policy. The government managed to ramp-up its mask production from 1.8 million masks per day to 16 million per day in three months, and such a process demanded tremendous resource reallocation and integration.
- 3 For one thing, the cost of information hiding is higher in democracy and there may be tangible electoral gains when voters learn more about policy-relevant information (Besley and Burgess 2002).

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