

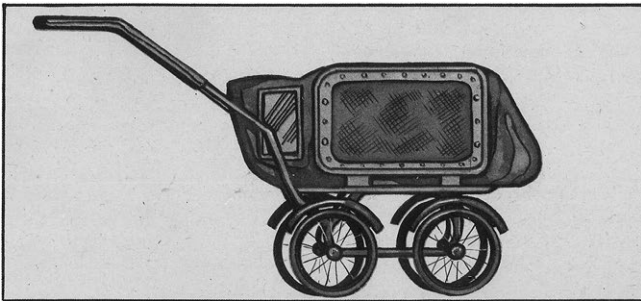
Lasting Effects of COVID-19 on States and Societies

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The COVID-19 pandemic will permanently change our societies predominantly by accelerating changes that were already underway. This will happen in ways large and small, and many will be positive, but not all.

First the positive. Already universities which had resisted moving to online courses for fear of losing their core differentiator—a campus *esprit du corps*—have been forced to go online. Those that do not successfully make the transition will be disadvantaged going forward. Those companies that urged their employees to work from home will accelerate the adoption of distributed working and prove that working from home can be extremely productive. This will provide individuals much more flexibility in how they work. All those government services that were not available online will become so. Notary services in New

York City, for example, will now be available virtually. That should have happened ten years ago!

The fact that everyone now is Zooming, Skyping and Meeting virtually, a phenomenon that was trending upwards, has now grown exponentially. This, too, is a trend of social interaction that will deepen within all societies, easing loneliness, especially among the elderly and those who live alone in large cities around the world. Facetime, Hangouts, among others, will have been normalized as people use them together for cocktail hour. Interestingly, my church is broadcasting its service on Facebook Live. On a typical Sunday we would have 300+ attend physically. Online we had close to 15,000!

But as this technical supplement becomes a substitute there will also be downsides. Despite the technical tools that exist to draw us closer together, the result of “social distancing” will apply to countries as well. In the West, the pandemic will reinforce an already deepening sense that “globalization” is a bug, not a feature. Businesses that will be able to restart after the crisis—and there will be fewer of them—will loathe to replicate their exposure to supply-chain disruptions. And those countries that have closed borders may keep them closed for longer than clinically necessary. Fear of travel will deepen in the U.S.

Race to the bottom strategies being pursued by Russia and Saudi Arabia in the oil market may be deployed in other markets as well (pharmaceuticals, for example), which would threaten not just a particular country’s competitors (the U.S. fracking industry, in this case), but the health of the country. All of this could also end up in imperiling the dollar’s dominance globally. These factors will put increasing pressure on an already strained U.S.-China relationship.

Finally, in democracies, the COVID-19 pandemic will shift the Overton window to the right. It is clear that governments already want access to more privacy-invading tools to respond to these sorts of crises, seeing what Asian democracies—and the PRC—were able to do with them. And citizens will support these efforts. This may well be the most lasting effect of COVID-19 in our technically advanced democracies—their further erosion.