Democracy, Culture, and Contagion: Political Regimes and Countries Responsiveness to Covid-19

Carl Benedikt Frey (Oxford Martin School, Oxford University) carl.frey@oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk; Chinchih Chen (Oxford Martin School, Oxford University) chinchih.chen@oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk; Giorgio Presidente (Oxford Martin School, Oxford University) giorgio.presidente@oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk

Abstract
A widely held belief is that autocratic governments have been more effective in reducing the movement of people to curb the spread of Covid-19. Using the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT), and a real-time dataset with daily information on travel and movement across 111 countries, we find that autocratic regimes imposed more stringent lockdowns and relied more on contact tracing. However, we find no evidence that autocratic governments were more effective in reducing travel, and evidence to the contrary: countries with democratically accountable governments introduced less stringent lockdowns but were approximately 20% more effective in reducing geographic mobility at the same level of policy stringency. In addition, building on a large literature on cross-cultural psychology, we show that for the same policy stringency, countries with more obedient and collectivist cultural traits experienced larger declines in geographic mobility relative to their more individualistic counterparts. We conclude that collectivist and democratic countries have implemented relatively effective responses to Covid-19.

Data description
We build a dataset allowing us to trace the daily spread of Covid-19 cases, government’s response to the pandemic, and the movement of people across 111 countries over the entire lockdown period to date. Data on movement and travel were collected from Google’s Community Mobility Reports, and matched with information on policy restrictions, testing, and tracing from the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) (Hale et al., 2020). OxCGRT is a novel dataset which is published by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. It contains various lockdown measures, such as testing policy and contact tracing, school and workplace closings, travel restrictions, bans on public gatherings, and stay-at-home requirements, etc. These measures constantly updated to reflect daily changes in policy. To measure democratic institutions, we collect data from Freedom in the World 2020, compiled by Freedom House. The second variable is a dummy variable equal to 1 if a country classified as authoritarian, taken from Dictatorship Countries Population 2020, compiled by the World Population Review. To examine the role of culture, we employ the individualism-collectivism measure from Hofstede’s (2001). We also create a novel measure of attitudes towards obedience and conformity by running a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on data from the World Value Survey (WVS).

JEL codes: H11; H12; P48; Z1

Key-words: Covid-19, Democracy, State Capacity, Culture, Policy

Working paper