

Dr. Li Wenliang, the man who first identified Covid-19, had the chance to tell people about the lives soon to be at stake. The one thing standing in his way? His government. Following the weeks after Dr. Li's discovery and outreach to other doctors, police came to his house on multiple occasions to tell him to stop. At one point, he was summoned to the Chinese Public Security Bureau, where he was met by officials claiming that he was disturbing public order. Dr. Li was trying to warn the medical community about a threat that would span the world and kill at least half a million people within a matter of months, but the very people meant to protect him took his voice away. The passing of Dr. Li in early February to Covid-19 serves as a stark reminder of the impact that authoritarian rule has over more than 50 countries today.

As nations search for the most effective ways to combat Covid-19, the authoritarian policies employed by dictatorships have the potential to spread elsewhere. Covid-19 has not just endangered our health, but our right to experience life with liberties too. The freedom and right to prosperity that I and others have enjoyed may now be at risk due to democracies taking a more intrusive approach towards containing the virus. Democratic nations need to ensure that citizen's liberties are not sacrificed for the "greater good". Thus, democracies must strike a balance between doing everything in their power to stop Covid-19 without infringing on the rights of their people.

As a child of immigrants and the first born American in my family, authoritarian rule seems to be a thing of the past for me. However, both current and former democracies are implementing more draconian policies in order to keep their citizens in line. The alleged success that China, North Korea, and other totalitarian regimes found when combatting Covid-19 has other nations inclined to enact similar policies. Thailand has jailed political opponents and stopped free speech using laws supposedly meant to stop Covid-19. The Philippines has created an anti-terror bill to mute all of those critical of the government, implemented under Covid-19's guise. In Italy, Israel and other countries, residents could

only walk up to one hundred yards away from their house during the height of the pandemic. While this is not the first time that repressive policies have been implemented in many nations, there may be long-lasting consequences. The effects of Covid-19 stretch beyond human lives at risk. The most dangerous virus of the century may completely shift global power and government structure. However, we are also seeing examples of democracies taking the right steps to combat Covid-19, without infringing on their citizens' rights.

Nations and states such as Taiwan and Rhode Island show how well a democracy can function under the most stressing of circumstances. Taiwan, despite being situated less than 100 miles away from China, as of July 11, 2020, has only 449 people infected. Why? Taiwan has run digital PSA's and announcements urging citizens to heed health warnings ever since the country recorded its first case. Now, all Taiwanese citizens can be seen wearing masks and keeping to themselves, complying with a powerful health campaign created by the government. While non-democratic nations will enforce social distancing through harsh punishments, Taiwanese citizens trust their government and doctors. Rhode Island went down a different path, opting to work with corporations in order to contain Covid-19. Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo worked together with CVS and Salesforce to test a quarter of all Rhode Island citizens and create a contact tracing app. Taiwan and Rhode Island represent what democracies should strive for. They were able to contain Covid-19 without hostility, and now their economies and citizens are prospering.

My home borough of Queens, NYC, was one of the hardest hit places in the country. I struggled with being contained at home for what seemed like forever. I missed my speech team, I missed my teachers, and I missed my friends. Yet, I could still walk around and enjoy the sun as long as I was careful. I could bike with friends and socialize as long as I had a mask on. What would happen if I went for a walk in Russia? Would I be fined? Arrested? Even though Covid-19 has dramatically changed our way of life, my government allows me to experience it. I need connection with others to stay sane, and

many others do too. It is up to democracies to approach Covid-19 with democratic values at their heart.

Otherwise, the fate that Dr. Li Wenliang suffered through may only be the beginning.

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