

The strength of a country's good political system is the governance capacity

By Professor Yuan Zhang

A good political path is a system exploring development that is in line with people's aspirations. American-style democracy is being widely questioned, and the Capitol Hill riot on January 6, 2021 have intensified these questions. Democracy as a value is a universal common value of humanity and a precious and important achievement of human political civilization. However, it is a pity for the people to cherish the idea of democracy on the one hand, and to argue among political forces on the other hand about what is a universal democracy. There is not just one path to democracy. An exclusive way of judging the "democracy" of other countries by one country is not a respect for democracy, but a way of polarizing the world and pushing it back to a Cold War-style confrontation. The denial of democracy-building efforts in other countries is a bullying tactic of the hegemonic powers to compress the space for democratic development in countries "other than our own", and it also reveals its lack of self-confidence in the depths.

I. Real democracy and ultimate human rights are only possible with people-centered development.

Prosperity is the only way to guarantee the implementation of democracy. Illegal economic sanctions imposed on a heterogeneous civilization because its political system is not in line with the Western vision will only destroy people's living standards and the political situation of stability. American-style democracy promoted by money politics is only a game for the rich, not a guarantee of civil and human rights. Economic weakness and economic downturn are common anxieties around the world. In the general environment of economic growth slowdown or even stagnation, use political reasons to artificially draw barriers between countries to block mutual respect and cooperation, the ultimate harm is the interests of people.

National economic and social development is the eternal pursuit of all countries. China strives to strike a balance between democracy and development, takes development as its first priority, and boosts democracy on the basis of national development, rather than hollowing out the



democratic system into a castle in the air detached from the reality of national conditions. A political system divorced from national development will eventually grow less attraction over time. Instead of mechanically copying the political development paths of other countries' political systems, it is better to promote the maturation of democratic systems in a steady and gradual and problem-oriented way on the basis of an accurate grasp of the historical stage that the country is in.

II. Democracy should not be a banner to incite separatism.

The evolution of democracy in Western countries has revealed more and more practical problems today. The dilemma of internal polarization and fragmentation has been clearly set in front of current Western politics. One person, One vote is by no means the only democracy principle. Flabby party competition does not guarantee that governments run the country effectively.

Too much decentralization of national political power may lead to people being confined to small groups with petty interests, ignoring the collective interests that the country really needs. Citizens lose the will to unite with one another and lack trust in one another. Rival faction that accommodates social fragmentation makes party politics more fragile. In those societies, Neutral, moderate centrist parties with a traditional sense of responsibility no longer have decisive public appeal. The generalization of social networks has also objectively lowered the threshold of the domestic political game and dismantled previous multiparty political system.

In the international arena, violating the sovereignty of other

countries under the pretext of democracy is an alienation of the democratic system. The major powers that forcefully promote unbefitting democratization influenced the domestic political stability in Afghanistan and Iraq after the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War.

III. A good political system should take full cognizance of the people's aspirations.

Sound political institutional arrangements need to advocate real and functional democratic practices in whole process of democratic elections, consultations, coordination, decision-making, implementation, management, inspection, oversight, and accountability. Democracy is the right of the people, not a privilege of other countries. A good political system should fulfill the people's sense of happiness, satisfaction and security. A good political system is one that protects the rights and interests of the greatest number of people, represents the people's will, pools people's wisdom and strength. A good political system is responsive to the changes of the times so that it has bright future. A good political system is one that is rooted in the country's profound culture, fits the national conditions and is embraced by the people.

IV. Effectiveness of governance is the benchmark of a good political system

Western-style democratic system design does not imply an effectively implemented democratic system, much less one that necessarily leads to a highly competent national governance capacity nor a modernized national governance system. Polls in many Western countries showed that a high percentage of the population resents drawn-out and lengthy

political infighting. A political system that governs effectively means that the system is able to effectively regulate harmonious relations between government and society, balance the demands of different groups, shape vibrant political parties, and coalesce cohesive ethnic relations. Efficient, uncorrupt, and cohesive capacity of national governance is a guarantee for the maintenance of national sovereignty, security, and development interests in a changing international situation.

V. Democratic relations between countries deserve more promoting.

Relations between countries should not be a zero-sum game full of competition and hostility. There is no lack of tragedies that non-Western allied countries have been demonized by hegemonism for pursuing sovereign independence and not duplicating other's political system. The establishment of democratic institutions is a long-term process. The way to enhance the attractiveness of democracy is to consolidate the country's economic and composite national strength, to improve people's living standards, and to provide practical help to other countries, not just shouting slogans or making enemies, let alone international bullying that uses force to force other countries to change their development paths. Each country has the right to follow its own path of democratic development, and the political future of each country should be in the hands of its own people.

There are many ways to achieve democracy, and diversity is the charm of human civilization. Cooperation, sharing progress together among countries, advocating inclusiveness, equality, justice and harmony safeguard achievements of human civilization, what makes a positive global international order.

Global affairs should be jointly governed by all countries in the world, and the fruits of global development should be shared by all countries in the world. American-style democracy is not the only kind of democracy, Eastern democracy may better represent the future.

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Ten richest men double fortunes in pandemic

From page 1 ► Billionaires' wealth has risen more since COVID-19 began than it has in the last 14 years. At \$5 trillion dollars, this is the biggest surge in billionaire wealth since records began.

To put that into perspective, Oxfam's report says a one-off 99-percent tax on the ten richest men's "pandemic windfalls", could pay to:

One: make enough vaccines for the world. And two: provide universal healthcare and social protection, fund climate adaptation, and reduce gender-based violence in over 80 countries

And quite astonishingly, that would still leave these men \$8 billion better off than they were before the pandemic.

The report calling for a new tax targeting the world's wealthiest follows an investigation into the taxes of billionaires, published by the nonprofit news organization ProPublica last year, which found that the ultra-wealthy are able to use legal loopholes to avoid paying taxes on wealth gains.

The Oxfam International Executive Director says "billionaires have had a terrific pandemic. Central banks pumped trillions of dollars into financial markets to save the economy, yet much of that has ended up lining the pockets of billionaires riding a stock market boom"

She adds "vaccines were meant to end this pandemic, yet rich governments allowed pharma billionaires and monopolies to cut off the supply to billions of people. The result is that every kind of inequality imaginable risks rising. The predictability of it is sickening. The consequences of it kill".

Oxfam describes extreme inequality as a form of economic violence, where policies and political decisions that maintain the wealth and power of a privileged few result in direct harm to the vast majority of ordinary people across the world and the planet itself.

Bucher points out that the "world's response to the pandemic has unleashed this economic violence particularly acutely across racialized, marginalized and gendered lines"

The pandemic has hit racialized groups the hardest. According to Oxfam, during the second wave of the pandemic in England, people of Bangladeshi origin were five times more likely to die from COVID-19 than the White British population. Black people in Brazil are 1.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than White people. In the US, 3.4 million Black Americans would be alive today if their life expectancy was the same as White people, this is directly linked to historical racism and colonialism.

The global charity movement warns inequality between countries is expected to rise for the first time in a generation. It argues that developing countries (denied access to sufficient vaccines because of rich governments' protection of pharmaceutical corporations' monopolies) have been forced to slash social spending as their debt levels spiral and now face the prospect of austerity measures.

The proportion of people with COVID-19 who die from the virus in developing countries is roughly double that in rich countries.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed openly both the motive of greed, and the opportunity by political and economic means, by which extreme inequality has become an instrument of economic violence," Bucher said. "After years now of researching and campaigning on the issue, this is the shocking but inevitable conclusion that Oxfam has had to reach today."

Oxfam also says that despite the huge cost

of fighting the pandemic, in the past two years rich country governments have failed to increase taxes on the wealth of the richest and continued to privatize public goods such as vaccine science. They have encouraged corporate monopolies to such a degree that in the pandemic period alone, the increase in market concentration threatens to be more in one year than in the past 15 years from 2000 to 2015.

"Inequality at such pace and scale is happening by choice, not chance," Bucher said. "Not only have our economic structures made all of us less safe against this pandemic, they are actively enabling those who are already extremely rich and powerful to exploit this crisis for their own profit."

The global charity movement also recommends that governments urgently:

1. Clawback the gains made by billionaires by taxing this huge new wealth made since the start of the pandemic through permanent wealth and capital taxes.

2. Invest the trillions that could be raised by these taxes toward progressive spending on universal healthcare and social protection, climate change adaptation, and gender-based violence prevention and programming.

3. Tackle laws that discriminate against women and racialized people and create new gender-equal laws to uproot violence and discrimination. All sectors of society must urgently define policies that will ensure women, racialized, and other oppressed groups are represented in all decision-making spaces.

4. End laws that undermine the rights of workers to unionize and strike, and set up stronger legal standards to protect them.

5. Rich governments must immediately waive intellectual property rules over COVID-19 vaccine technologies to allow more countries to produce safe and effective vaccines to usher in the end of the pandemic.

Bucher says "there is no shortage of money. That lie died when governments released \$16 trillion to respond to the pandemic. There is only a shortage of courage and imagination needed to break free from the failed, deadly straitjacket of extreme neoliberalism. Governments would be wise to listen to the movements, the young climate strikers, Black Lives Matter activists, Indian farmers, and others - who are demanding justice and equality".

Oxfam says its calculations and research have been documented based on the most up-to-date and comprehensive data sources available. Figures on the very richest in society come from Forbes' 2021 Billionaires List. Figures on the share of wealth come from the Credit Suisse Research Institute's Global Wealth Databook 2021. Information on the falling incomes of the global 99% was taken from World Bank.

According to Forbes, the 10 richest people, as of 30 November 2021, have seen their fortunes grow by \$821 billion dollars since March 2020. The 10 richest men were listed as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bernard Arnault & family, Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Ballmer, and Warren Buffet.

Abby Maxman, the chief of Oxfam America, says "one of the single most powerful tools we have to address this level of egregious and deadly inequality is to tax the rich".

Maxman also notes that "instead of lining the pockets of the ultra-wealthy, we should be investing billions of dollars into our economy, our children, and our planet, paving the way for a more equal and sustainable future."

Biden should not have delayed rejoining JCPOA: ex-White House official

"France provided the nuclear reactor and secretly the plutonium separation plant to Israel"

From page 1 ► Following is the text of the interview with Frank Von Hippel, who was responsible for national security issues in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy from 1993 to 1994:

In a recent interview Noam Chomsky has called Iran and China "alleged threats" to U.S. interests. He has said that the problem is the existence of Iran and China that can challenge U.S. hegemony, not their threat. What is your comment?

I think the Iranian and Chinese cases are very different.

In the case of Iran, the primary focus of the U.S. government is on the danger of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons in the context of its apparent hostility to Israel (evidenced by Iran's support of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Syria).

I don't think Iran would use nuclear weapons on Israel, but I am also against any country, including the United States and Israel, having nuclear weapons.

China's peaceful economic rise under Deng Xiaoping and his successors was a wonder. The recent turn under Xi Jinping toward repression internally and "wolf-warrior diplomacy" abroad is a concern. In this context, the U.S. focus on maintaining dominance in China's neighborhood has created a danger of collision and war. I worry par-

ticularly about the possibility of a war if Xi Jinping decides it is time to suppress local autonomy in Taiwan as he recently did in Hong Kong.

Republicans and some Democrats have been trying to block Biden when it comes to reviving the nuclear pact. Given this fact, do you think the Biden administration is capable of restoring the JCPOA?

I hope it will be possible to revive the JCPOA. I think the most promising approach would be step-by-step compliance-for-compliance to increase mutual confidence.

Do you think there is a possibility of Israeli attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities without a U.S. green light?

I worry that Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear experts and facilities and Iran's understandable reactions to those attacks have made negotiations more difficult, but I hope that, with Netanyahu sidelined, the recognition by Israel's security establishment that the JCPOA is in Israel's security interest will be given more weight.

Some American officials believe the disastrous situation that all parties to the JCPOA are facing is the result of Trump's "maximum pressure" policy against Iran. In your view, to what extent can we blame Trump and his administration in this regard while the Biden administration ac-

tually failed to start nuclear talks timely?

I think both these points are valid. Trump taking the U.S. out of the JCPOA was very destructive to the nuclear nonproliferation regime and potentially to stability in the Middle East (West Asia). And the Biden administration should not have delayed rejoining the JCPOA in parallel to Iran coming back into compliance and should not have added requirements of additional negotiations on ballistic missiles and regional activities.

In his interview Chomsky proposed an initiative called "nuclear-weapons-free zone in West Asia. He said "everyone is in favor of that, including Iran. The U.S. blocks it, because they would have to open up Israeli nuclear weapons to inspection, and the U.S. won't permit that." How could it be justified in the U.S.?

Israel acquired nuclear weapons without U.S. support. France provided the nuclear reactor and (secretly) the plutonium separation plant.

Israel has set as a condition on giving up its nuclear weapons that all its neighbors accept Israel's right to exist. I assume it also has the condition that none of its neighbors have nuclear weapons either.

The original problem Israel's neighbors had with Israel was its expulsion of the Palestinians. Now the focus is more that the Palestinians have their own state. Unfortunately, Israel is split internally on giving that to the Palestinians and is slowly allowing Israeli settlers to take land that should be reserved for a future Palestine. Nevertheless, Israel also has slowly been improving its relations with its Arab neighbors.

Frank Von Hippel says Biden "should not have added requirements of additional negotiations on ballistic missiles and regional activities" to a revival of the JCPOA.

