6.A. Round table: Protecting borders and preparing for a pandemic: responses around the world to COVID19

Organised by: University of Michigan (USA)
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COVID19 challenges every dimension of public health systems, from research and health care treatment to public communication, coercive mechanisms such as quarantine, and respect for individual rights. This round table has 3 key objectives:

• To understand patterns in responses across countries, and in particular the different ways that authoritarian and democratic regimes responded;
• To identify comparative lessons for understanding the European experience from other high-income health systems;
• To draw conclusions about the politics of effective public health intervention and likely lessons of COVID19.

Burris will present on how although initial control efforts took the form of travel restrictions, quarantine and isolation, sustained human-to-human community transmission of COVID-19 in the United States pushed authorities to move from these traditional tools to the challenge of promoting social distancing behavior and managing a surge in demand for health care. These challenges posed new and urgent questions of practical regulation and distributive justice as underlying social disparities created differing levels of vulnerability. This presentation reviews the first six months of the response in the US from a legal and social justice standpoint, focusing on issues of equity. Fafard will analyze the communications role of senior public health officials during the COVID-19 outbreak in five countries; their public messaging across a range of media platforms, including how they deal with misinformation; and the extent to which members of the public receive, understand, and trust this messaging. Kavanagh will discuss how relative democratic and autocratic political institutions have influenced early responses to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Using evidence from process tracing in China, Iran, the United States, South Korea, and Italy, this presentation evaluates the hypothesis advanced or implied by many global public health officials that authoritarian governments have an advantage in disease response. Peralta will discuss how severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) epidemic highlighted the heterogeneity in the measured used for containment and mitigation by governments. Where authoritarian states, that theoretically have more policy options for containment and mitigation, have an advantage in an epidemic event remains unclear. This presentation will compare measures taken by governments and health authorities in five selected authoritarian states and five democracies and evaluate the capacity of epidemic containment. Willison will highlight how political elites in the United States define public health threats; how partisanship and party competition define public health responses, including expenditure and coordination; and how party and media elites draw on established tensions in American politics to frame outbreaks in ways advantageous to the parties.
Key messages:
- We will focus on similarities and differences in responses to COVID-19 around the world, highlight effective measures, and reflect on lessons learned in the first few months of this novel coronavirus.
- We will draw attention to issues of human rights and health equity among government responses.

Panelists:

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