CHAPPELL LAWSON: It's 11:05, so let's begin. Welcome to everybody, and thank you all very much for coming in such a tumultuous time. I first want to thank our sponsors, the MIT Center for International Studies, the MISTI program and the Security Studies program at MIT for hosting this event, and in particular thanks to the CIS staff Laura Kerwin and Michelle English, who are working frantically behind the scenes to make sure all the technology functions properly. If it does not, it is my fault, rather than theirs. And finally, I want to thank our panelists, three eminent scholars who have graciously agreed to address the topic under discussion today, culture and COVID.

First, let me offer a couple apologies and then some ground rules. I'm at home, and my computer is too antiquated to allow me to display the CIS logo in the back, so you'll have to just imagine it there. Secondly, because I'm at home, you may be distracted occasionally by the sound of two small children beating each other with wiffleball bats. And again, I apologize for that in advance.

In terms of ground rules, this event is entirely public. It's being livestreamed on the CIS Facebook page. During the talk, we'll be sending out additional links to material via the chat function. It will all be recorded, and then available to people for viewing afterwards. You'll receive an email after the event with a link, which you can then access or share. And the question and answer chat function will also be recorded, that thread, and available for viewing, as well.

So we're attempting here what is potentially an ill-advised experiment with such a very large audience. The Q&A feature on Zoom is fully enabled. So you can ask your own questions, you can comment on the questions of others, you can upload certain questions for me to note and then ask of our panelists, and you can seek clarification on panelists' remarks, if you wish.

I just want to emphasize that the usual rules of civility and collegiality should apply to this, especially since it's being recorded, and with the added admonition that this function works best with soundbite-style comments, rather than lengthy discourses on specific topics. I will do my best to triage these questions, and then offer them to the panelists after they make their initial remarks. I can't guarantee that I will do this adroitly, but I will try to leave as much time for question and answer as I possibly

can, and to get to all the questions that are there.

So by way of introduction, culture is a vexed term in the world of social science. Aside possibly from anthropologists, most scholars these days are extremely reluctant to ascribe outcomes to culture, whether the outcomes are the behavior of specific individuals, like why a small group of experts adopted a particular policy, or large-scale societal changes, like public reactions to pandemics. Many scholars deny the existence of national cultures at all, and they point out the elites may reason differently about policy choices from ordinary people, or medical professionals may have a different set of habits and beliefs than non-medical professionals.

But the basic question related to culture is how do the habits and mindsets and beliefs of a group of people, what Alexis de Tocqueville once called mores, affect what they do in the public sphere? And in this case, how did those beliefs and norms affect what different countries did in response to the emergence of the SARS-CoV-19 virus.

As we all know, different countries have pursued very different policies, from pretending it's not happening, as in Belarus, to very loose and voluntary guidelines in Sweden, to very strict lockdowns in Spain and New Zealand and South Korea, from massive contact tracing in South Korea to much more targeted and less intrusive efforts in Japan. And some of the choices that governments have made may be a product of culture.

Furthermore, among the countries that have adopted similar policies, these policies seem to have had very different effects sometimes-- greater or lesser citizen compliance with government edicts, higher or lower death rates, faster or slower rates of spread, and more or less economic dislocation. Some of these differences in outcomes may also be related to people's beliefs and norms, and may vary across countries.

So here, we're not attempting to provide any kind of formal, systematic, academic treatment of the subject-- that is, how specific beliefs matter for a specific outcomes across a representative sample of countries-- but instead offer a broad scan of the landscape from three experts in different regions of the world. And I should just

emphasize that these are all renowned experts in their countries.

So with that introduction, and I should say here are their bios, but you'll receive a link to their full bios via chat, so with that introduction, I'm going to turn it over to our first speaker, Suzanne Berger.

SUZANNE BERGER: I'm a longtime France watcher, and as I was packing up my books to close my MIT office last March, I thought to myself, let's see what France can do with this. I thought that COVID was exactly the kind of crisis that France should excel in managing. In the first place, France has an excellent national health service that covers all citizens. It has world-class medical research and laboratories like the Pasteur Institute that specialize in the development and commercialization of vaccines.

MIT has strong collaborations with French medical and biological research. In fact, many of our MISTI students have interned in those laboratories, and we know and respect them. France has a strong central government, with practically no possibilities for regions or cities to defy national policies in the way that we see in the United States.

And finally, there are strong cultural norms in France that usually work to strengthen the hand of higher authorities. A French sociologist, Michel Crozier, in a book called *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* that was published 50 years ago, first described these norms in a study of French factories. And what he observed was that the French are very reluctant to accept the authority of peers. When problems come up on the factory floor or in a social organization or in neighborhood life, people are usually quite unwilling to accept a decision that would grant some of their peers the authority to resolve the problem locally.

Instead, almost always, problems get pushed up in an organization towards a more distant authority, an authority that feels safer exactly because it has less personal and specific information about individuals. Having conflicts resolved by distant authority feels safer to the French, so one should have anticipated that the French would feel right about national authority making the rules about masks and social distancing and testing. And not only that that would be right and legitimate, but that it would be the best possible solution.

And finally, I think the French did see this from the very beginning as a national challenge, a challenge in which they would be tested and compared to other nations. And above all, as always, the French were thinking that they might be tested and compared to Germany. And so one of the interesting facts was that, whereas the rest of the world was reading a book by a Frenchman, *The Plague* by Camus, the French themselves were reading a book called *The Strange Defeat,* which was about the defeat of the French in 1940 facing the Germans. So the French did see this as a national challenge.

And what's interesting is that, despite all of these factors, which should have made for good outcomes, or at least for less bad outcomes, France has had among the worst of outcomes in Europe. Despite having had quite a lot of lead time and advance warning, and having been able to watch the disease ravage northern Italy, France has had among the worst European outcomes, with 30,000 deaths in a population of 67 million, in contrast to Germany, which has had 9,000 deaths in a population of 83 million.

So I think the question we want to answer is, what went wrong here? And I think when we start to think about that problem, it's important to recognize that the French government of President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe started from a bad point in their relations with the French public. The [FRENCH], the Yellow Vest protests were still very vivid in the public mind, and there had been even more recent big strikes against proposed changes in national pension and retirement rules.

But still and all, at the beginning of the COVID crisis, in mid-March, a survey found that 55% of the French had confidence that the government would be able to manage the crisis. That number started falling rapidly, and by the end of April, only 39% were confident in government. So what went wrong?

Well, first of all, it turned out that the national stockpiles of masks had been not only depleted, but destroyed. Of the 600 million masks that were there in 2018, only 100 million were found to be viable, in good shape, and others had been destroyed. The minister of health at the time had tried to have supplies replenished, but her request was turned down as excessive, even ridiculed. Currently, there is a parliamentary inquest into what happened, and they're not really yet able to figure

out whether any replenishing was ordered or ever took place.

And at the same time that the news about the failures of national provision leaked out, the government started issuing multiple and confusing directives about wearing masks. Initially, the government said masks would not protect the wearer, but maybe should be worn anyway to protect others. Then, the government said sternly that masks really all should be left for health workers, but in any event, that there were enough masks for everyone.

That was a claim that the French could easily verify was not true, simply by going to a pharmacy and trying to buy one. And then, the canny French began to wonder why it was that a mask could protect a health worker, but not themselves. So by early May, a survey found that 76% of the French believed that the government was lying about masks, and so confidence all this time falling, falling.

And then, another rumor spread. And that was the rumor that there was a simple, cheap cure for COVID, but that the government was hiding the facts about it because powerful business interests in the pharmaceutical industry wanted more expensive drugs to be used, and these powerful pharmaceutical interests had captured government decision-makers, so there was a conspiracy against the cheap available cure.

The simple, cheap cure was, you've guessed it, hydroxychloroquine, Plaquenil. President Trump's favorite COVID remedy. In the case of France, however, the person who is pushing hydroxychloroquine was quite a famous scientist, a medical researcher, Professor [INAUDIBLE], a doctor located in Marseilles who had observed improvement with a very small number of patients when he administered hydroxychloroquine. Nothing like a random controlled trial.

Dr. [INAUDIBLE] had an unusual career as a scientist, since he had the largest number of publications of any French scientist and he was among the top dozen number of scientists cited in scientific publications. Perhaps one should also notice that 25% of those citations were self-citations. But in any event, because of his numbers and the way in which French research funding is administered, Dr. [INAUDIBLE] had been able to bring lots of research funding to Marseilles.

Even more important, he had a number of powerful local politicians on his side. And so as the controversy gained steam, right-wing parties also rallied to his side, and the polarization which we've seen divide the United States over how to deal with COVID took form in France, too, in the shape of a fight over science, scientific method, and drugs.

So what can we conclude from this? Well, first of all, what are the French concluding? I think they are concluding that essential commodities need to be produced in France. And the government has just begun by negotiating with, really pressuring, four French pharmaceutical companies to start making Tylenol in France. Masks and swabs will also be national.

Now, once you start making a list of what's an essential commodity, however, that list can quickly get very open-ended indeed. And I think that what the French are going to need to think about, as we Americans do, too, is how to make access to supplies that are vital for health resilient, not necessarily national. The second lesson, I think, in observing the cases of France and Germany that what we can recognize is that the most vital national supply is trust. Everything that's involved in dealing with COVID-- contact tracing and tracking, testing-- all these really depend on trust. And that's what's been sadly depleted in the French case.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Thank you very much, Suzanne. And thank you also for staying within the time limit. Let me turn it over now to our next speaker. I believe Yasheng, you're up.

YASHENG HUANG: Thank you, Chap. Very happy to be on this forum with Suzanne and Peter and [INAUDIBLE]. I really think that Chap got it really right about this role of culture. And we need to talk about it more. And sometimes, social scientists dismiss it because they can't really quantify culture, but I think that's the wrong attitude. The right attitude should be, OK, it's hard to study, it's hard to measure, and we should try harder, rather than saying it doesn't matter.

Now, my own view-- and I'm going to talk about China and East Asia-- I think culture mattered tremendously in this response, as well as in terms of the outcome. One way to think about culture is people act on certain norms without thinking about those norms every day. And they don't question some of the assumptions, they just sort of behave out without asking questions whether this is the right assumption or

the wrong assumption.

So one way to use this way to look at what has happened in China and other parts of East Asia is that, when the government declares a lockdown, in Chinese case, it's lockdown of the entire city with 11 million people, and then the province, people don't question it. So they implicitly believe that this is for their own good. And obviously, how do we know, right? So people will say this is an autocracy, and maybe there are rebellions, and we just don't know. But I doubt that their discontent is so large that-- if it is so large, we would know something about it.

So going back to 2018, there was a survey by a German sociologist on Chinese attitude toward AI and digital surveillance. And the survey shows that the Chinese public actually supported the digital surveillance, even though many people in the West think about it as a digital autocracy. And the researcher took care to take into account people may not answer their question honestly. She took care of that, and it still shows a large degree of support.

So it is not right to attribute the ability to lock down the entire city, to lock down the entire province solely through the coercive power of the government, even though there is a lot of that, as well. So we need to acknowledge the coercive power, but we also need to say that there is a cultural component in accepting the order, in accepting the government policy. And also, to some extent, the power of the government is big in part because of coercion, but also in part because of the acceptance. And I'm actually working on a book on that, sort of tracing the history of cultural compliance, and going back through thousands of years of Chinese history.

So there's a cultural compliance. And that's trust in government, trust in authority. Suzanne talked about the lack of peer trust. You know, the French may not trust each other, but they may trust the government. I think in the Chinese culture, in the East Asian culture, there is quite a bit of trust. Sometimes it's not earned, and sometimes it's not deserved, but there is that to begin with.

The other cultural issue is what I call habit of technology. And this is related to the culture in terms of privacy, in terms of those things. So having the technology basically says that people there automatically think about technology as a solution.

It is very interesting for me-- I was born in China, raised in China-- when I was in China, when you watch movies about sci-fi, so it's about future, technology is always portrayed positively, right? Solving problems, it's great future. And then I came to the United States. There's *Blade Runner, Black Mirror, Frankenstein.*

So technology is actually portrayed very, very negatively. And this is a little bit problematic for those of us who are professors at MIT. And it is really interesting how popular imagination in the United States holds technology very negatively, whereas in China, in Asia, in South Korea, in Japan, in Singapore, technology is, by and large, thought of very positively, and in part because there is less concern about privacy-- and so this is related to the cultural point-- but also because there is more trust in high-tech companies. And that's not what we have in the United States. There's a lot of distrust of Facebook, distrust of Google, Microsoft in the early era, whereas in Asia, by and large, people trust high-tech companies.

Also, the government has a role to play because of big data. So a lot of the technology solutions to COVID-19, like QR code to monitor your individual health and to use Bluetooth technologies to connect you with other users of the same QR code, those are mandated by the government. So the technology companies supply the solution, but it is really the government that made it a mandate to download the QR code. So there is implicitly trust in government, as well. So I surrender this data on some sort of assumption that the government is not going to use this against me in the future.

I think the third thing is the power of the government, as I said before. But the power of the government does not only rest on coercion, does not only rest on police, army, although there is a lot of that. But if you look at East Asian democracies-- South Korea, Taiwan-- it's not a police state, it's a vibrant democracy. People sort of comply with the government.

So the power of the government comes not just from the compulsory power of the government, but it also comes from acceptance of the power of the government. So that's culture. It's not DNA, it's not really genetics, it's really sort of thousands of years of history and making it acceptable for that.

The last thing I want to talk about related to culture is-- so Suzanne mentioned

wearing masks. In East Asia, almost nobody questioned the value of wearing masks, and people began to wear masks very early on, without the government mandate. I was in China in December 2019, and I already knew that there was something in Wuhan, but I didn't know the extent of the outbreak. People in Hong Kong already began to wear masks on their own in late December and early January, just on their own.

So look at the debate that is going on in the United States now between the politicians about wearing masks, the value of wearing masks. It is very interesting and, to some extent, puzzling why-- and by the way, this is true even in Massachusetts. In the early days of the pandemic, what I heard was that, even in Mass General Hospital, doctors in early March, in late February didn't wear masks. These are doctors, and they didn't wear masks.

I think this is a very interesting mentality. There is a lot of questioning of the value of the wearing of the mask. Rather than taking the fact that East Asians wear masks as a data point, there's a lot of questioning of that. And so more than 1 billion people were wearing a mask. Somehow, that didn't matter. And then you have to sort of figure out the value of the mask on their own. I don't quite understand that mentality.

And maybe this is a cultural empiricism, so the emphasis on empirical evidence. So the doctors really stress that phase three clinical trial, so there's placebo test. You have to do that, rather than taking observational data on their face value and say, OK, there's something to that. If more than 1 billion people were already doing things, maybe there's something that we should do, as well. So I think that's a difference that I see. There is not this sort of constant questioning of things like wearing masks in Asia.

The last thing I want to mention is that-- and this is not so much culture-- one big difference between Asia and Europe and the United States is that Asia experienced SARS. And China experienced SARS, Hong Kong experienced SARS, Taiwan experienced SARS. And that searing experience shaped the mentality and the government [INAUDIBLE] and the public attitude toward the COVID-19. So people there understood how severe the situation was on day one, and then they behaved that way.

And this is something we know, right? So COVID-19 is about biology, but it's really about behavior, how we behave. Social distancing is about behavior. Wearing a mask is about behavior. And how we behave has a big impact on the disease outbreak and spread, whereas in Asia, there is already that habit already because of SARS. Thank you very much.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Yasheng, thank you very much. And let me turn it over to Peter.

PETER KRAUSE: Great. Thank you so much, Chap. And thank you to the MIT Center for International Studies for inviting me. It's an honor to be on this panel with Suzanne and Yasheng and Chap. So in terms of my background, just briefly, I've done fieldwork in many parts of the Middle East over the past decade. Actually, some my fieldwork started when I was a PhD student at MIT, using some funds and support from MISTI. So I'm excited to try to give back there, and also say to any of the students watching, I hope that in the not too distant future we're able to reinitiate those programs and have people travel to this glorious region.

The four countries I'm going to talk about are Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. And I've spent a series of months and years living in each of them and doing research. A lot of my focus is on nationalism and political violence, but when I'm there, I'm also, obviously, very plugged into the government and society. I have not, obviously, been to any of these four countries since COVID and the pandemic came about, but like Suzanne, I'm an avid consumer of news from the region, and I've been discussing with many of my contacts in these countries about local response and government response to COVID-19, the pandemic.

What I'll say in general, before I go in depth into each of the countries, is simply there's obviously no single political culture across Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. In fact, there's quite different and varying cultures within each of those four countries. But two key aspects of culture I think matter here in terms of response is, number one, political culture in terms of interaction between the citizens and their government, particularly in terms of trust with the government and restriction of civil liberties.

And then secondly, there's a religious element here, religious culture. Because we

had the month of Ramadan in April and May during the pandemic, as well as in countries like Israel, where you have the ultra orthodox and religious worship a key part of society, that obviously poses big challenges, because when you have collective worship among tens or hundreds or thousands of people, those can obviously be key instances for the spread of the virus. And so that's been a particularly dicey issue in these countries, in terms of restricting worship for some societies that are quite religious.

So first I'll say the good news for these four countries, which is, thankfully, COVID-19 has not hit the Middle East nearly as hard as any of the other countries we've heard discussed today. Compared to China, compared to Europe and France, compared to the United States, all four of these countries have had far lower rates of cases and deaths. So if we just do some basic stats on deaths per million, in the United States, it's been about 362 deaths per million. In France, which Suzanne talked about, it was about 454 deaths per million.

Jordan is less than 1 per million, Lebanon is 4.6, Egypt is 12, and Israel is 34. Even the most deadly country, quote unquote, for coronavirus among the four is less than 1/10 of what the rate has been in the United States. So overall, these countries have been doing far better than the US and Europe and China in terms of this virus. And to be clear, it's not so much because of their policies. Some of it, honestly, I think is luck because of the fact that the initial outbreaks in China and then in countries like Italy, you don't have, I think, as high travel internationally for a lot of the populations in these countries as you do from, say, France to Italy or the US to China, et cetera.

And so I think a lot of it is these countries cracked down in terms of having quarantine and social distancing similar times to when the US and European countries did. You know, late February, early March. The difference was, when they did so, they had a far smaller number of cases. So for example, some of these countries had in the tens, you know, 20, 30 cases when they locked down in early March, versus countries in Europe or elsewhere that had maybe in the hundreds or the thousands. And so that makes a big difference in terms of their effectiveness.

All right, so let's just start talking about Egypt for a little bit. The thing I want to focus on with Egypt is something called the Emergency Law. Back in 1958, the Egyptian

government passed a law that basically allows the executive to suspend a significant amount of civil liberties, gives the government significant control and armed forces significant control over the population. And Egyptians have been living with this Emergency Law in various forms in the decades after that. It's only been suspended a couple of times, most recently in 2012, after you had the revolution in Egypt amidst the Arab Spring. But it's been reinstated in recent years.

What's happened in the past year or so is that there's been 18 new amendments to the Emergency Law, which allows the president of Egypt, President Sisi, not just to shut down schools, universities, provide economic support to affected communities, but also to ban public and private gatherings, even without COVID-19 or other public health emergencies. The government has used some of these authorities to actually arrest journalists who have questioned Egypt's handling of the pandemic, as well as their reporting on the number of cases, the number of deaths.

A lot of external reports on Egypt have suggested that the number of deaths in cases is 5 to 10 times as much as what the government is suggesting, and yet some of those journalists have been expelled from the country or arrested because of that. And again, that's not something that's outside the realm of government authority. They actually have those authorities under the Emergency Law.

Egypt currently does have kind of a nighttime curfew, but they're starting to resume international flights on July 1st, as are a number of countries across the Middle East, in part because Egypt has a number of economic problems. They get a lot of foreign currency from tourism and travel, and so it's been very difficult for them to kind of cut off the outside world in that regard. And so they're starting to reopen. The challenge is that they're doing so amidst significant political tensions.

So Egypt is coming to the brink of war in its neighboring Libya, with Turkey and other actors who are trying to structure the Libyan government. They're also potentially not at the brink of war, but discussing the possibility of it with Ethiopia over a massive dam that Ethiopia has built on the Nile, which obviously is a key source of economic strength for Egypt. And so all of what's going on with the pandemic feeds into these regional tensions for the country, as well as kind of these crackdowns on civil liberties, which, I think, unfortunately, are going to outlive the pandemic itself.

We see something similar in Jordan, to some extent. The country locked down in mid-March. At that point, it had about 34 cases and no deaths. Similarly to Egypt, there is a version of kind of an emergency law that gives the king some sweeping powers, which he has used. But nonetheless, there has not been significant local transmission in Jordan. Generally, Jordanians, I think, have been quite receptive to kind of the general lockdown when, again, the government's had significant authority to kind of enact it. And so therefore, Jordan's had quite a low level of cases.

Turning to Israel, they've had a key issue regarding the culture of civil liberties versus security. Israel is a country, if you talk to Israelis, they'll say, look, we face some of the greatest military and political threats of any country. For that reason, the Israelis often willingly do give up greater civil liberties to kind of protect their country and themselves. And that's certainly come to the fore in the pandemic.

There was a pretty significant and swift response by the Israeli government, which is quite centralized. Unlike the United States, Israel does not have individual states or a federal system. It's quite centralized. And so social distancing, requirement of masks, et cetera, shutting down of synagogues and worship all occurred at various points. And just to give you a quick comparison between, say, the state of Massachusetts and Israel, which are somewhat similar in size and population-- Israel's got a couple of million more people-- just the state of Massachusetts, where we're in here, has had about 100,000 cases and 8,000 deaths. Israel's had about 20,000 cases and 300 deaths. So again, a significant improvement for Israel in terms of their handling of the pandemic in terms of the caseload there.

Some of this has come from the fact that Israel has mobilized its intelligence assets. So not only has it mobilized the Mossad, kind of its international intelligence agency to help secure medical supplies, but also domestically-- and this is one of the more controversial issues-- the Shin Bet, which is an internal domestic intelligence agency has used tracking of citizens in Israel via their cell phones. So basically, I tell them via text, hey, you've been in contact with someone who has come down with COVID-19. And this is not something they signed up for. All of a sudden, they're just getting texts to kind of tell them this stuff.

Now, Israelis know that their intelligence services have this, but much more often, it's used to track Palestinians in the West Bank, et cetera. There hasn't been that much resistance to this domestically because people felt like maybe this is going to be a temporary thing. But the Israeli Supreme Court did step in and crack down and say, look, you have to pass a law in the Knesset if you're going to continue this practice.

So that's been somewhat tabled because the number of cases was dissipating, and so the government felt like, OK, we don't really have to put this into a law. But just yesterday, Israel had its largest spike in cases in [INAUDIBLE], which is a little city kind of South of Tel Aviv, and in [INAUDIBLE], which is one of the largest Arab cities in the country. And so in that sense, they might have to come to grips with, again, this idea of civil liberties, and to what extent people want to give those up to get more security or health.

Finally, just briefly in terms of Lebanon, Lebanon is actually one of the earliest countries to crack down in the world. After China and Italy, Lebanon cracked down at the very end of February, when they only had a few cases. They closed schools. And it's one of the few things the Lebanese government has done incredibly well. Very small number of cases, hasn't had significant spikes, et cetera. The problem is, leading up to the pandemic, Lebanon has had a massive economic collapse.

The currency has lost about 70% of its value. There's about 35% unemployment in the country. And those of you who are watching from MIT, if you want a comparison, the American University of Beirut, which is, in many ways, the gem of education in the Middle East, is facing 25% layoffs of all faculty and staff. They are facing all of these challenges, and all of this is going through the lens of sectarianism.

The AUB president said "the poison of the American Constitution was slavery. The poison of the Lebanese constitution is sectarianism." Basically, the idea that the government is organized around these various ethnic groups. There have been massive protests in Lebanon over the past months and years trying to change the corruption in the government. And so all of this with the pandemic is happening against the backdrop of economic collapse, political upheaval. And that is changing the culture in Lebanese society amidst the pandemic. So in any case, thank you again for having me on the panel. I look forward to talking about any one of these

countries and their cultures.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Thank you, Peter. And thanks to all of you. I just want to remind everyone that the Q&A function is enabled. And we've gotten some great questions so far. I think I will use moderator's privilege here to ask a couple questions of the panel, and then let them decide which ones they want to take a swing at. But ideally, briefly, so we have more time for some of the questions that did come through the chat.

It seems like two of the cultural elements that might matter most with regard to COVID are, A, how trusting government affects people's willingness to participate in contact tracing regimes and to share personally identified information, either with the government or with some non-government platform that will track their movements.

Secondly, there may be a broader norm of libertarianism versus communitarianism, with Americans, particularly, say, in Texas, being most resistant to the notion of being told when they can go out in public and what they can wear when they do. So reflecting on those two issues, the role of trust in government and these broader norms of libertarianism or communitarianism, how do your countries stack up? Why don't we start with Peter? We'll go in reverse order.

PETER KRAUSE: Sure. So obviously, I can't talk about all four of them, but I'll focus on one in particular. I'll focus on Israel. One of the populations-- excuse me-- that has some of the least trust in government is the ultra-orthodox population. So in Israel, you have individuals, ultra-orthodox Jews who sometimes live in kind of their own somewhat secluded, depending on the situation, communities.

And those were some of the communities that had the biggest initial outbreaks of COVID-19. The challenge there is that those communities oftentimes don't have great trust in the Israeli governments, don't necessarily adhere to its policies. And you know, many Israelis in general somewhat take pride in the fact that you're not going to kind of tell them what to do, et cetera.

But that has certainly been a challenge, because whether it was social distancing on Shabbat amidst religious worship or otherwise, those communities have been less likely to socially distance or listen to kind of government's edicts on these issues, to the point that actually some ultra-orthodox leaders just in the past week

have called for the government to shut down synagogues again, simply because of the fact that most of them are not built to be able to equip social distancing with the number of worshippers.

And so in that sense, I think what you're seeing is not just countrywide, but within each country-- certainly Lebanon, with the various sectarian groups, or in Israel, with the ultra-orthodox or the Arab community-- you see these legacies of a lack of trust in government because of discrimination in the past or other issues like that that make it so, when you face a pandemic, those communities are less well served by the government, and honestly, less well served in terms of their own communication in relation with the government because of that legacy of mistrust.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Excellent. I just want to mention, Peter, that there are some very specific questions on Israel and UAE in the chat that you may want to take a swing at--

PETER KRAUSE: I'm going to respond to those right now.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: --while I turn it over to Yasheng.

YASHENG HUANG: Yeah, Chap, very interesting question and observation. I think sometimes people say that Asian countries have a collectivist culture. And let me make a distinction between collectivism and communitarianism. The collectivism thinking is that there is an inevitable conflict between the interests of the individuals and the interests of the society. And you should suppress your own individual interests in the service of overall greater good of the society.

Communitarianism. I think-- I'm not a philosopher, so this is an amateurish interpretation of communitarianism-- communitarianism is about serving the community is actually also beneficial to the individuals, and whereas libertarianism rejects the overlap between individual interests and the communal interests. And that's what we are seeing now in the rest of the United States. So I think there is that difference, and the other is the trust in institutions and trust in government. I think there's a lot of unearned trust in China. You know, just look at the history of the country, the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward and all of that.

Still, there is trust. And that trust can be deployed for good purposes. In this particular case, if you look at the map of China, and the outbreak was confined to Wuhan and to Hubei province. Now, Beijing has an outbreak now, but the scale is not nearly as big as in Wuhan. They quickly came down to control it. Whereas if you look at the United States, initially, it was in Europe, it was in Massachusetts, California, Washington state. Now, it's all over the country. So clearly, containment strategy worked in China. It didn't quite work in the United States.

I think partially it is trust in the government. And when there is so much questioning of the government, and including the commander in chief-- in this particular case, Trump himself is devaluing the good things that a government can do-- and by the way, that started with Ronald Reagan-- that's very destructive. And it is hugely damaging because, in a pandemic, it's really the government, the federal government to be specific, who is best capable of handling the crisis. So I'm not trying to portray an overwhelmingly positive picture of what happened in China and what happened in East Asia, but I do believe, in a crisis scenario, that power can come into handy use.

In the case of Israel, so my own personal preference is to see an explicit legal invocation of the special power of the government. Whereas in China, there is not that process. You don't need to go through that process. Israel now, maybe they have to go through that. I think that's a better arrangement.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Yasheng, before I turn it over to Suzanne on this same question, in the chat, we're getting a lot of pushback on two issues with regard to East Asia. First has to do with the immense heterogeneity within East Asian countries' responses to COVID, which is also matched by the heterogeneity in responses among countries not in East Asia. So is this really a question of, say, some broader East Asian culture versus other parts of the globe, or is it something much more subtle than that?

Secondly, there were some questions about whether culture might have affected not only the direct response to COVID, but some of the governmental decisions that happened initially after the pandemic was discovered, including the suppression of the reports by the original doctor, his ultimate death, and a number of other aspects of the Chinese response that are different from the later mandates to shut down the economy or wear masks or engage in contact tracing. So why don't you think of

those while I turn it over to Suzanne, and then we'll come right back to you.

Professor Berger, it's muted, so let me just make sure that's unmuted.

SUZANNE BERGER: So in France, there are traditionally strong anti-statist cultures, as well as more or less strong attachment to the state. But I think that what I tried to emphasize in my earlier presentation was the fact that there is a national culture in which the willingness to have authority exercised at higher levels of the group than local levels of the group, that's a quite general pattern across society. And even in those groups that may have relatively anti-statist views, usually the notion is that authority should be exercised at higher levels. Perhaps not by this cast of politicians, but by a different cast of politicians.

So those who oppose Macron and the policies of the Macron government in managing the COVID crisis are most likely to be the supporters of Le Pen or the supporters of an extreme left politician, [INAUDIBLE]. And they've proposed not really anything that looks like a libertarian response, but rather to replace Macron with their leaders and their politicians.

So the politics plays out not as in the United States, between a federal government or local and state governments, which would seek to regulate individual behavior, and those who believe that their behavior should be regulated by no one but themselves, but rather between alternative teams of politicians struggling for control of the state.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Terrific. Yasheng, why don't you take a swing at a couple of those questions that I mentioned?

YASHENG HUANG: Yeah, so those are excellent questions. And let me just be very, very clear that I do not mean to defend the initial response by the Chinese government to the outbreak. That doctor was censored, and that really played a role in the escalation of the crisis. I actually wrote a piece in Boston Review arguing that, if they had acted quickly, they didn't have to resort to this dramatic lockdown later on. They could have done what Korea did. Korea didn't resort to a dramatic-- so this is related to the first question-- a dramatic lockdown. And they did contact tracing, they did testing aggressively, and then they contained the disease outbreak using, you know, some intrusive means, but not nearly as intrusive as they used in China.

But I think we need to make a distinction between a political discussion and a cultural discussion. So in my prepared remarks, I was talking about culture, and general acceptance. And that includes trust in high tech, in technology, high-tech companies, and also trusting government, as well. We need to make a distinction between that and the organization of the political system.

And so there are people who argue, look at China, the authoritarian system worked out very well because they contained the disease. I actually don't agree with that view. My view is that, if you look at South Korea, which is not an autocracy, it's a democracy, Taiwan is not an autocracy, it's a democracy, they did a pretty good job. Germany did a very good job, France didn't.

So there's a lot of [INAUDIBLE] in terms of the outcomes. The nature of the political system doesn't explain it. I mean, there's not a clean explanation that autocracies have done a good job. There's probably not a clear explanation that democracies have done, necessarily, a good job. So either way, I think it's too early to draw a conclusion on which political system is better.

But on culture, even though East Asian countries had different types of responses, there were lot of commonalities-- wearing masks, accepting the words of the government, accepting the words of the doctors, accepting the words of the scientists. And that's a commonality. And wearing a mask is a very visible piece of data illustrating how common that practice was across different political systems. And I think culture has something to do with that.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: So that's a great [INAUDIBLE] our last question. We're almost at the end, but there were a number of queries in the chat about what the long-run impact of this pandemic might be on culture. Is this something that's frame-breaking enough to shift the culture of the country? That is, either to change world views or beliefs, or to change habits, for instance, wearing masks.

And I've heard from Professor Berger, it sounds like, in some ways, this is reinforcing some of the existing traits in French culture. And in Israel, maybe a little bit at the same thing. But are there circumstances or countries in which this represents a profound shock to the system and people's ideas really will change as a result? So

we don't have much time, again, so if I could just get quick telegraphic comments from everybody, starting with Suzanne.

SUZANNE BERGER: I would say that, basically, I think it's going to be a shock that promotes nationalism. That is, a desire for more protection from the state, a desire for closing up the borders, a desire for having more production take place within national boundaries.

PETER KRAUSE: My quick take is I think that the impact of it in the Middle East is going to be somewhat lessened because of the smaller number of cases, but I will say this. One of the key areas that you look at in each of these four countries is social trust between different ethnic groups. In Egypt, between the Coptic community and the Muslim community, in Israel, between the Arab community and the Jewish community, in Lebanon, between the very sectarian groups, Jordanians, between East or West Bankers.

One of the things that I'll keep an eye on is, when you have pandemics like this, certain populations can get accused of being kind of the carriers of the disease, and face greater discrimination going forward. And so that can break down some of the bonds of social trust. That will be, potentially, one of the key legacies, if that happens, going forward.

YASHENG HUANG: So Chap, I would just say one sentence. I think for us living in the West, we do need to think, in the long run, about the value it plays on privacy, and vis-a-vis other values such as public safety, health, and things like that. We need to have that debate

I don't have a view now-- well, I have a view, but we don't really have a collective view on that, but I think it should be debated more in the future.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: I think that's an excellent spot at which to formally adjourn the meeting because we're at the hour. There were a number of questions that we didn't get to, for which I apologize. I'm going to invite anyone who wants to stay behind for a few more minutes to do so, but also to release anyone who's got a noon appointment, including any of our speakers who have other commitments.

But before I do, let me just thank everybody for coming at a difficult period in America's history, and in the middle of the week, as well, at a time when many

people are very busy. And just to extend a special thanks to our CIS staff-- Laura Kerwin and Michelle English, who made this possible, and to MISTI'S David Dolev, who had the original inspiration for this event. And, of course, to our speakers.

So thank you very much. Those of you who wish to continue chatting via Q&A, or informally with panelists, may do so. And to the rest of you all, I hope you have a wonderful day, and pay attention to the CIS website for upcoming events.

For those people who haven't dropped off yet, I will just add a remark about Yasheng's last point regarding privacy. And there are two very different ways to conceptualize privacy, one of which-- the most traditional-- has to do with the type of personally identified information that the government might have about you. There is a different way to think about it, which is, what can the government do to you based on that information? So, what are the adverse, individual-level consequences that can be imposed?

And we spend a great deal of time talking about the first question, but it's possible that that question is much less problematic if the action that the government can take against you, based on the information that you provide, is itself quite mild.

And furthermore, if you have some confidence in the government that that information will be used prudently and that the government itself will be a good steward of that information-- rather than letting it, say, be disseminated by hackers-- that approach to the privacy question, to me, is the way the United States needs to focus now.

It's emerged in other contexts-- counterterrorism, other issues of homeland security, but I think the epidemic puts it really in bold relief. What is the sort of thing that the government could do to you based on the sorts of information that you would need to share to make an effective contact-tracing regime possible? And are we worried about that the same way we would be worried about, say, other law enforcement responses?

And then, secondarily, what can we do to guarantee that the information will be used in ways that citizens want it to be used, and ultimately deleted after the pandemic is over? And thinking about the problem in that way may allow us to move forward on the privacy debate rather than having the continuous discussion

of whether the government is engaging in some Orwellian surveillance exercise or not.

YASHENG HUANG: So Chappell, I very much agree with how you framed the issue. The thing I have seen is that a lot of the privacy discussions are framed in absolutist terms, so privacy somehow has an intrinsic value. So you are decoupling privacy, as an issue, from the use of privacy by the government. I think that's a very productive way to go. Then the discussion is really about the government use of the data.

Then we should talk about politics. We should talk about the nature of the government. And what I find fascinating is-- it's probably because I grew up in China-- what I find fascinating is in a democracy, you have freedom of speech, you have elections, and you can actually affect who is your leader and all of that. We still have this incredible negative view of the government.

I can imagine, in a political system where you don't have any influence on the politicians, you don't have any influence on who the next president is, then you have a very negative view of the government because you can't really affect that. But I find it interesting that people have such a negative view of the government in the United States and yet they don't exercise their right to vote. So the turnout, even in presidential elections, is, like, 60% or 50%. To me this is really, really puzzling.

So if you have such a--

CHAPPELL LAWSON: There is, though, a significant wedge between you're voting for a president or for a party and your ability to affect this specific policy outcome.

YASHENG HUANG: Oh, sure--

CHAPPELL LAWSON: It's very unlikely that you would change your vote based on this specific policy outcome, especially if what's on offer from the politicians is not that different.

But to me, the right answer to this question is first of all, for the government to engage in fully transparent debate about what will be done with the data. That is, to make it totally explicit the ways in which the data will be used and what will happen

afterwards. And I think that's a role partly for the executive branch, but also partly for Congress at the federal level. So that has to happen before people can feel confident.

And to me, the other thing that has to happen is that we have to feel convinced that the government is a good steward of the data in a world of cyber-snooping. So all of my personally identified information, including all the information that went into my background check, is now in the hands of the Chinese government. And that's because the Chinese government was able to infiltrate the Office of Personnel Management at the White House and steal all the data and then use it however it wants.

So I think until people feel like they have some trust that their information won't be stolen and then misused, even if they think the government's motives are benign, we can never get past the current logjam.

PETER KRAUSE: The thing I'll add, Chappell, is that-- a lot of my research is on terrorism and I teach and write a lot about this civil liberties versus security debate. And I think there's a couple of elements that you're touching on that are important.

One is, what is the length of time that the government has these powers and responsibilities? Because with something, a pandemic like this, we could see a scenario where we say, OK, you get these powers to do quarantine or whatever else, but there's an expiration date to it. You don't just get to have these forever.

One of the worrying concerns with a country like Egypt or otherwise, is that you have this ratcheting effect, where you get these powers and these authorities to deal with this particular threat, but then you get to maintain those powers and authorities thereafter because governments, believe it or not, as you guys know better than I do, don't like to give up power very often. So that's certainly a challenge, and I think you see that with the pandemic, as well.

The other thing that I'll say is that when we talk about civil liberties and giving up power, you also really need someone to watch the watchers. So step one is, of course, having a legislative body that can interact with the executive and not a rubber stamp, and in some of these countries, you don't really see that. These 18 amendments that were passed in Egypt that President Sisi gets, basically the entire

legislature is like, OK, yeah, we support this no problem. And then you also don't have laws and a culture that have clear transparency where, for journalists or otherwise, to hold governments to account.

If you look at the US, in terms of the torture report and these types of things, a lot of that comes out of leaking to or publishing in newspapers, et cetera. So I think to talk about civil liberties and what people are willing to give up, if you have checks and balances in the government and then certainly checks and balances and transparency with journalists, and then an expiration date, I think people are more OK. You don't have those two elements, that's when it gets dicier.

YASHENG HUANG: So Chappell, I do want to counter your observation that the elections-- because it's such a big separation and distance between elections and the privacy issues. But the fundamental issue here is whether or not we trust the government.

So those who don't trust the government on the issue of privacy, I bet they are also the same people who don't trust government on many, many other things. Maybe on gun control, maybe on vaccines, maybe on those other things. So elections are a way to build up that trust. So I think the issue here is really to think about why this democratic mechanism has failed to, one, to get the turnout rate even remotely close to 100% so you actually have an opportunity to effect a trust or not a distrust in the government.

That's one, and the other is that I agree with the way that you lay out things, but that's a very different way that we have heard about the debate on privacy. This is a utilitarian way of framing privacy, so there is a benefit and there's a cost, and let's look at the benefit and cost, rather than this rights-based-- so it's my right, and I don't care about the benefits. I don't care about the cost to the society without sharing my data.

So we have to shift that discussion first and foremost on the absolutist view on privacy to a why--

CHAPPELL LAWSON: I think that that's exactly--

YASHENG --is inherent?

HUANG:

CHAPPELL LAWSON: That's exactly the right thing. And the trope I often use with people is, let's imagine that we were dealing with an epidemic here that didn't have an infection fatality rate of between 0.3% and 0.7% across the whole population. Let's imagine that we were dealing with an epidemic that had an average infection fatality rate of 5%, something closer to SARS or MERS, even though they may even be higher, or something like Ebola.

People, I think, would then recognize instinctively and intuitively the fact that there is, indeed, a trade-off, and would be more amenable to having the cost-benefit discussion that you suggested. And the reality is we will, in our lifetimes, almost certainly confront exactly that issue. That is, a contagion where the infection fatality rate is considerably higher than that of SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19. And at that point, I think we'll have to wrestle with these issues. So hopefully, we'll have a regime in place before that.

YASHENG HUANG: But--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I think we're already at that point. I mean, we are already at that point, right? So COVID-19, the infection rate is very, very high. Maybe the mortality rate is not that high, but the infection rate-- if we are not willing to seriously go into a discussion of this issue now, I just don't know when we're ready to do that.

Just think about the cost of not containing this disease outbreak. So you and I are stuck at home, we're not at MIT. Companies are closed down. Even now, we're not willing to discuss this issue. I just think that that's-- that's not--

CHAPPELL LAWSON: I agree with you. I think this is going to be a great moment, but there is an argument to be made that a lot of the measures have been excessive given what we now know about the infection fatality rate. But if the infection fatality rate were an order of magnitude higher, then all of the measures that have been taken are an under-reaction.

And so I think right now we're in the debate about whether it was worth putting the

economy into a tailspin through having large-scale lockdowns, versus whether it would have been better to focus on a more targeted strategy. Given, of course-- again, Monday morning quarterbacking-- what we now know about the true infection fatality rate, which is much lower than we originally thought it was. And it affects certain populations much more than the bulk of the population.

So I think we're having a debate right now in the policy realm about whether it's better to focus on protecting the vulnerable populations, sequestering, insulating them, and then allowing the rest of the world to go about its business. We've been having this debate within MIT about students returning in the fall, right? So I think that is complicating it.

But I will say I agree with you that this is a good moment, and it's a much easier conversation to have in the public health context than we've had in the past in a counter-terrorism context, which has been the way we've tried to have this debate before. And of course, the likelihood that one will die as a result of terrorism is so vanishingly small compared to the likelihood that someone will die of COVID, so it's a much easier discussion to have in the context of a public health crisis than it was in the previous Homeland Security debate on this issue.

YASHENG HUANG: Well, I look forward to another forum when we discuss these things.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: We should do that. And to all-- thanks to you, Yasheng, for staying. Thanks for the 60 other people who also decided to stay behind and hear our sidebar. And with that, I will formally adjourn. And Yasheng, look forward to seeing you about campus once we can actually see each other about campus.

YASHENG HUANG: Yeah. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to have this discussion. Thank you.

CHAPPELL LAWSON: Thanks to all.