

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Electing not to secure

Security is a choice. People sometimes (often) elect not to secure. As a result, they take risks for rewards. In some cases, the reward being unfettered freedom, also known as anarchy. With rare exceptions, so-called anarchists are in fact not really anarchists at all, because they don't really understand what life without government is or ever has been.

Security at what cost?

When faced with the bill for doing security well, many (most?) decision-makers balk and question the value of what they are getting. And this is generally sensible, because most security offerings play on irrational fear rather than rational fear. Yes, fear is rational in many cases. Fear of COVID-19 is rational, and wearing a mask and physical separation are known to work while going to a bar or political rally indoors without masks and getting drunk (perhaps with power) is known to work the other way (good for spreading disease to yourself, your family, and killing yourself and family members).

But the fear of COVID-19 is balanced by many against their desire for freedom to do as they choose, go where they choose, etc. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness... but at what cost? The thing here is that when your liberty impacts my life, the libertarian ideal (do what you want – as long as it doesn't interfere with someone else's ability to do what they want) falls over. Because with public health, your disease impinges on my right to life.

The analogy to cyberspace is quite simple and clear. We have a public health crisis, but not just because of the biological disease. It's because of the memetic disease of our society. The memetic disease has no effective presence at the national level in any current country, and the Centers for Disease Control notion doesn't cover mental health in this sense.

Securing the election?

To be clear, we should actively seek to secure the mechanisms of elections across the globe. But the notion of trying to use the intelligence agencies of the world to control disease is problematic for many reasons. Perhaps the most important reason is that we try to keep science away from politics if we want good science. When science becomes politicized, we get bad science, and even worse politics. Just as the CDC has surveillance from medical practitioners to detect the spread of infectious diseases, we need surveillance to detect memetic diseases. While intelligence agencies have the means to do such surveillance, if abused, this exacerbates rather than mitigates the problem.

Perhaps more importantly, elections are largely about a memetic struggle between alternative narratives delivered by the candidates, their surrogates, and the rest of their society. As such, if the marketplace of ideas and decisions of the population are to be the determinant of outcomes, we cannot officially suppress or influence opinions or their expressions.

The decision not to secure elections from memetic attack is problematic, but it is also problematic to seek to secure this by governmental action. How do we balance the equities?

Balancing the equities

At a fundamental level, there is a notion of fairness. In the memetic world where we have the presumption of religious freedom, or more generally, the freedom of belief, even in the face of directly refuting fact, attempting to directly influence beliefs is considered unacceptable.

On the other hand, the long history of societies seeking cohesion is largely driven by a set of public assumptions and memes that are pushed by the government. Indeed the very basics of governments and groups of all sorts include symbols intended to sustain a public unification of ideas. Flags and their history, national anthems, national birds, national monuments, and so forth, are all part of memetic influence campaigns. These are things that bind people together and, as such, form the group cohesion required to counter divide and conquer strategies used by opposing groups.

One thing we can almost certainly buy into is that the government can make true statements of fact. However, selective disclosure of facts is also problematic. As such, open and transparent government is vital to limiting selective fact biases.

Not how intelligence agencies usually work

Most good intelligence agencies are designed and intended to provide a set of facts and reasonable conclusions to leaders. But the classification system that provides a means to continue to get reliable intelligence by limiting access to sources and methods that would otherwise be stopped or unduly influenced by opponents, also limits the disclosure of facts in favor of conclusions. As a result, intelligence agencies are often used to deceive the public while informing national leadership.

But it is how medical surveillance has worked – until recently

Historically, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and even the UN-based World Health Organization (WHO) have been apolitical. They collect and report information on public health on a national and global basis. They generally provide statistical results openly and without bias (except of course for the inherent biases associated with the points of collection).

The concept of not trusting medical professionals is, of course, enormously disruptive to everything about the lives and health of people. But of course, like any population, not all medical professionals are honest or worthy of the trust they are granted. But on a statistical basis, medical practitioners report reasonably accurate numbers, even if the standards of what is reported on what basis has been demonstrably corrupted in the current pandemic.

Perhaps we need an independent medical surveillance entity. Somehow, this bears on the very fundamentals of trusted parties and who we trust for what under what circumstances.

Conclusions

We are in a global pandemic and almost certainly will be for at least a few years. The need for accurate information relating to disease spread is a matter of life and death for at least tens of millions of people, and with residual health impacts likely for hundreds of millions of people. The corruption of the medical reporting system is an example of how meme control used by people in power results in catastrophic effects on the population at large. If we are to address this problem and the greater problem of electing to secure (or not) in general, there has to be a reliable way to get at facts. You would think we would be beyond this by now, but...