



Received: 2022/10/13
Accepted: 2023/07/5
Published: 2024/01/01

¹ PhD Student of International Relations, Department of Law, Theology and Political Science, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Email:
za.ahmadi1370@gmail.com

How to cite this article:
Ahmadi, Zahra. (2024). The Coronavirus Pandemic and Neoliberalism, *The International Journal of Humanities* (2024) Vol. 31 (1): (14-38).

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Coronavirus Pandemic and Neoliberalism

Zahra Ahmadi¹ 

Abstract: The pandemic caused by the rapid spread of the Coronavirus or Covid-19 impacted issues beyond the health-related ones. In fact, this disease proved itself to be what the scientists referred to as "total as social reality," which means an event influencing each and every aspect of society. This pandemic not only changed our daily lives and behaviors profoundly, but it also incurred far-reaching economic and political impacts. This article seeks to show how the Coronavirus epidemic could affect neoliberalism, which has become one of the dominant discourses of international relations and governments since the 1980s. Library sources and analytical-descriptive method are used in the course of this research. The results show that the Corona pandemic revealed the moral vacuum and economic failures at the heart of the neoliberalism-based "development" model that dominated global economic relations since the 1980s. Rather than putting politics and economics at the service of citizens, neoliberalism forced workers to serve the needs of the market. At the same time, neoliberalism discriminated public services, especially health care, in the face of the coronavirus challenges.

Keywords: Coronavirus; Neoliberalism; Economy; Health System; Governance Challenge.

Introduction

The recent global health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic is widely regarded as the most severe public health emergency since the outbreak of the "Spanish flu" in 1918. Despite the fact that the Spanish flu resulted in a greater number of direct and indirect fatalities, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the world, causing numerous tragedies, affecting survivors, and inflicting unprecedented economic damage. In fact, Covid-19 is one of the infectious and contagious ones called 2019-nCoV acute respiratory disease. Its outbreak was first reported on December 31, 2019, that quickly spread in China within a few weeks and spread to several other countries, including Italy, the United States, and Germany, within a month. (Neysani Samani, Farrokh Anari 2022: 23) The spread of the virus led to a significant disruption in global movement, with international companies grounding their planes and industry and economic supply chains collapsing. Trade severely reduced, and international travel was limited. The pandemic resulted in the loss of tens of millions of jobs within a few days, and many countries were forced to implement population quarantines. The pandemic also brought to light the functioning of countries and governments, with some adopting monopolistic approaches in the face of fear and dread. Neoliberalism, a model of governance prevalent in Western countries such as Britain and the United States, were criticized as a result. Experts have defined the pandemic as a crisis of the neoliberal economic model, highlighting the increasing vulnerability caused by neoliberalism. They argued that more than a decade after the global financial and economic crisis, neoliberal

capitalism was facing an existential crisis. The pandemic also exposed the disastrous consequences of years of privatization, deregulation, and outsourcing.

Hence, Corona had demonstrated the inflexibility of neoliberalism when faced with a global shock and non-economic or non-financial crisis. The pandemic made the contradictions of neoliberalism even clearer; hence, Corona was not only a public health crisis, but also a crisis of the model of neoliberalism (Nuni, 2020: 2). Our main goal in this article is to try to understand the performance and mutual effects of the Corona epidemic and the governance of the neoliberal model, which offers significant economic, technical and scientific opportunities.

The article also attempts to answer how the Corona epidemic could affect the governance model of neoliberalism, which has become one of the dominant discourses of international relations and government since the 1980s. It should be noted that the research using library and online resources and in a descriptive-analytical method, is based on the hypothesis that the Corona epidemic created identity and functional challenges for neoliberalism¹.

However, it is not possible to announce the end of its role and presence in the political arena any time soon. In order to evaluate this hypothesis, the basic concepts of neoliberalism will first be examined. And then, the performance of neoliberal governments in the face of Corona, which are

¹ It should be noted that some scientists believe that since social processes and institutions determine neoliberal identity, and since social processes and institutions are temporally enduring and slow to evolve, the neoliberal identity is not only assigned by others (i.e., society) but it is also persistent. In fact, Neoliberal identity is isolating, disconnected from any larger community, and as such leaves the individual alienated. Alienation is a product of neoliberal capitalism that makes clear the connection between the market and the need for a constructed self-identification (Wrenn, 2014)

the US and the UK at the top, will be analyzed at these levels: health, governance challenges and the political arena, economics and industry.

Research Background

In his essay "Neoliberalism Is Not Dead - On the Political Consequences of Covid-19" (2021), Miloš Šumonia argues that academic and media interpretations of "Emergent Keynesianism" identify neoliberalism with its anti-statist rhetoric. For neoliberalism is, and has always been, about 'the free market and the strong state'. In fact, rather than waning in the face of the coronavirus crisis, neoliberal states around the world are using the ongoing 'war against the viruses to strengthen their right-hand grip on the conditions of the working classes. However, Alfredo Saad Filho in "Neoliberalism and the Pandemic" (2021) believes that the pandemic has exposed the limits of neoliberalism as before. Imogen Richards in her article entitled " Neoliberalism, COVID-19 and conspiracy: pandemic management strategies and the far-right social turn" (2022) concludes that herd immunity strategies designed to address the economic growth imperatives of neoliberal societies have been done often against scientific advice, and have led to high rates of infection and mass death, particularly among workers in the manufacturing sector, and those employed in the health care and service delivery sectors. In his research "Neoliberalism and personal freedoms during COVID-19" (2021), James Chalk believes that the neoliberal countries of England and the United States have proven to be the most vulnerable countries to a global pandemic, however, the socialist countries of Germany and New Zealand have fared much better. In the article "Sociology

of Covid-19" (2020), Matthewman and Huppertz emphasize the harsh conditions of neoliberalism in the face of Corona. However, they believe that neoliberalism will continue to exist after the transition from this crisis. In "Universal health care and political economy, neoliberalism and effects of COVID-19: A view of systems and complexity" (2021), Peterson and Walker emphasize that the role of the approaches of neoliberal governments in creating increasing inequalities is seen as a key challenge for global health.

Origin and Foundation of Neoliberalism

The origin of the term neoliberalism dates back to the 1920s and the 1930s, after the Lippmann Conference organized by French philosopher Louis Rogier in Paris in 1938. It was very popular. Lippmann was an American journalist who published a book called "An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society" in 1937. The purpose of this conference was to develop a new liberal theory as a rejection of the collectivist or socialist approach. Participants at the time defined "neoliberalism", or "new liberalism", as a preference for "a price-setting mechanism, free enterprise, a competitive system, and strong and impartial government" (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009: 14). In the aftermath of World War II and during the Cold War between the capitalist and communist fronts, classic liberal theorists such as Milton Friedman used the term in his 1951 article entitled "Neoliberalism and Its Prospects". "If all obstacles can be overcome", he said that then neoliberalism offers real hope for a brighter future, a hope that is already a countercurrent that could awaken well-meaning people everywhere and thus become mainstream public opinion

(Friedman, 1951: 90). In the practical dimension, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s applied neoliberalism influenced by Friedman's work. British neoliberalism emerged through a neoliberal program of massive tax cuts for the rich, union busting, massive privatization of housing, communications, steel and gas, financial deregulation and competition in the provision of public services. Similar trends were observed in the United States with the Reagan administration destroying the power of unions. Social security has been threatened by cuts in food stamps and increases in corporate subsidies, leading to increased inequality and poverty (Pearse, 2021).

In a 1982 article entitled "A Neoliberal's Manifesto" Washington Post's editor Charles Peters examined how neoliberals defend financial liberalization and promote entrepreneurship as a "virtue". He said that if neoconservatives are liberals who have taken a critical look at liberalism and decided to become conservative, then we are liberals who have the same view of the road ahead and have decided to keep our goals but let go of some of our prejudices. Our main concerns are society, democracy, and prosperity, and among this economic growth is what we now consider most important, because it is essential to almost everything else, we want to achieve (Peters, 1982). In general, neoliberalism, both as a political ideology and as an economic policy framework, is designed to promote free market. Deregulation, globalization, open market, free trade, elimination of subsidies and rationing systems, and withdrawal of the government from many areas of social security as solutions for the existing challenges of the countries have been mentioned (Beals and et al., 2023). Also, the expansion of non-governmental organizations and transnational companies

has reduced the power of governments and changed the focus from security issues to economic ones. The five main assumptions of neoliberalism are as follows: 1. Systematic approach or level of systemic analysis 2. International anarchic² 3. States are rational actors who think of their absolute utility 4. States are the most important actors. At the same time, the role of non-state actors is emphasized) 5. The independent role of international institutions (Rezaei Eskandari, 2005: 117).

During the late 1990s, the neoliberal approach coincided with two significant developments. Firstly, the deregulation of financial markets, which subsequently contributed to the 2008 financial crisis and the ongoing euro crisis. Secondly, the globalization of the economy, which led to the creation of more ambitious trade agreements in the world of free financial flows. The power of money and globalization has become the most conspicuous manifestation of neoliberalism in the contemporary world (Rodrik, 2017). However, David Harvey, an expert in the study of neoliberalism, emphasizes that this approach is a "political project" initiated by capitalist enterprises with the objective of "reducing the workforce." He highlights how the emergence of social movements, consumer protection, and other reform initiatives has posed a threat to the interests of this class. Harvey maintains an unwavering conviction that the political endeavor of neoliberalism constitutes not only an "ideological assault" but also an "economic assault" gradually executed by the bourgeoisie or the commercial capitalist class (Risager, 2016). It is noteworthy, the empirical study of some of the new social movements at local, national, and global levels shows

² In international relations theory, the concept of anarchy is the idea that the world lacks any supreme authority or sovereignty. In an anarchic state, there is no hierarchically superior, coercive power that can resolve disputes, enforce law, or order the system of international politics. In international relations, anarchy is widely accepted as the starting point for international relations theory.

that some of them continue to pursue justice and fight against exploitation, as the basis of their identity. For example, in conjunction with the annual summit of major capitalist countries and their economic agents in Davos, in order to examine the prospects and depth of the current economic crisis and the way out of the global economic downturn, the Global Social Movement in Belem city, in the Amazon region of Brazil, gathered to express their opposition to the current order of the capitalist world, neoliberalism and the current policies of the capitalist world at the ninth World Social Movement (Madani Ghahfarokh and Mohammadi Ghareghani, 2019: 8) Critics of neoliberalism contend that the public policies enacted by US presidents, coupled with their indifference towards the plight of marginalized individuals, played a pivotal role in the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. According to Cornell West, the advent of neo-fascism marked the demise of the neoliberal era in the United States, which was characterized by a bleak future. West further asserts that despite the Obama administration's progressive rhetoric and symbolic overtures, it represented the final throes of neoliberalism (West, 2016).

Neoliberalism, from a purportedly normative perspective, espouses the principles of advancing free enterprise, ensuring equitable opportunities, and fostering potential prosperity as the "Natural" laws of the market. It has, to a certain degree, evolved into a right-wing postmodernism (Horgan 2020). As Hosseini says about the importance of criticism in the scientific community (Hosseini, 2023), Peirce, with a critical look at neoliberalism believes that according to scholarly discourse, the public policies of neoliberalism have emerged as a dominant force in major global capitals, including London and Washington. This ideology has transcended the traditional

political divide between right and left parties and has been embraced by various caucuses in the UK's House of Commons and the US Congress. It is noteworthy that even ostensibly left-leaning political entities, such as Britain's Labor Party and America's Democratic Party, have eventually adopted and assimilated neoliberalism into their fundamental tenets (Pearse, 2021). The influence of the neoliberal ideology has transcended its original conception, as its tenets have been adopted by various global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. These principles have been imposed on governments and establishments across the globe (Risager, 2016).

Corona Epidemic and Neoliberalism

1. Health System and Social Services

Governments with neoliberal tendencies have implemented a significant policy of privatization and commercialization of public services, including critical services such as medical care, which has had a profound impact on people's well-being. This policy was initiated during the late 1970s and the early 1980s by leaders such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and has been continued by conservative, liberal, and even social democratic governments in Europe. Notably, Tony Blair's government in the UK, Gerhard Schröder's social democratic government in Germany, and Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's socialist government in Spain, as well as former presidents George H.W. Bush, George Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump in the United States, have all expanded medicine commercialization

(Navarro, 2022: 271). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the impact of neoliberal policies on the health system and social services of countries. The implementation of this model of governance has resulted in the hollowing out, fragmentation, and privatization of health systems, while also creating a precarious and impoverished working class that is highly vulnerable to income and health risks due to low savings (Solty, 2021: 72). Algarin and his colleagues conducted a research on the health systems of 30 neoliberal European countries during the Corona epidemic. Their study focused on countries such as England, France, Italy, Spain, and Belgium, which have experienced the highest number of deaths related to Corona. The researchers discovered that an inverse relationship exists between the investment of public expenses in the health sector, the coverage of hospital beds, and the number of doctors, and the number of deaths per million people. Specifically, as the investment in public expenses in the health sector decreases, and the coverage of hospital beds and the number of doctors decreases, the number of deaths per million people increases (Algarin, et al., 2020: 1).

During a radio debate titled "Capitalism against Corona," the discussion centered on whether the United States' model of neoliberal capitalism and its economy are equipped to handle a health crisis of the magnitude of the Coronavirus pandemic. Jeffrey Sachs, the director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, stated that the country lacks a public health system and instead operates a private for-profit system. Additionally, tens of millions of citizens do not have health coverage, and there is no systematic health assessment in place. As the virus continued to spread across the United States, the country was seen struggling for weeks (Hasan,

2020). The far-right responses to the corona outbreak since its first international appearance in the early 2020s, which included the introduction of "herd immunity" and other discriminatory health policies by several governments, are the most apparent examples of neoliberal performance (Matthewman and Huppatz, 2020: 5). Aschwanden (2020) conducted an analysis of the reluctance exhibited by national governments in implementing social quarantines and other anti-virus measures, which often involved Malthusian-like justifications for health policies that resulted in the exclusion of certain populations. Heenan and Sturman (2020) observed that countries with neoliberal economic systems, such as the England and the United States, experienced adverse health effects due to the rapid spread of the virus. This had exacerbated by the lack of social and structural quarantines and the presence of private health systems, which allowed the virus to spread among the population, leaving individuals in precarious employment and living conditions, and with underlying health conditions, primarily to protect the economic industry at risk (Alwan et al., 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has elicited hyper-nationalist responses from both autocracies and liberal democracies, which have not only reinforced local prejudice but also increased competitive unilateralism between countries regarding treatments and vaccines. This has resulted in a fragmented global response to the pandemic, with countries prioritizing their own interests over global health concerns. Such responses have highlighted the limitations of the current global governance system in addressing global health crises and the need for a more coordinated and equitable approach to pandemic response.

In recent years, a trend has emerged in several neoliberal democracies whereby the responsibility for managing health and financial risks associated with pandemics has been shifted from the public to individual households. This shift represents a departure from the approach taken by certain other countries. As noted by Mitropoulos (2020), this trend has significant implications for the distribution of risk and responsibility within society. Wheeler (2020) has suggested that the government's apparent willingness to sacrifice individuals in order to rationalize the high incidence of infection may have served as a political diversion from the inadequacies of the public health system. These inadequacies, in turn, have been attributed to the austerity policies of the government's neoliberal agenda. This observation highlights the complex interplay between political ideology, public health policy, and the management of pandemics in contemporary society. Overall, the trend towards individualized risk management in neoliberal democracies raises important questions about the role of the state in protecting public health and ensuring social welfare. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to unfold, it was likely that these questions would become increasingly pressing.

The healthcare approach of neoliberal governments has been found to be inadequate, as evidenced by the situation in England where a decade of austerity measures has resulted in significant financial pressure on health services. This has led to a shortage of medical professionals, hospital beds, and medical equipment. The neoliberal ideology prioritizes the functioning of the free market over social safety nets for the impoverished, which has resulted in inadequate medical services for citizens of the United States, a country that adheres to neoliberal principles.

Furthermore, healthcare costs in the US are exorbitant, with an average bill of \$10,586 per capita, compared to \$4,070 in the UK and \$5,986 in Germany (Chalk, 2021: 95). According to Adam Gaffney, a Harvard Medical School professor and the chief of Physicians for the National Health Program, the public health system in the United States is deteriorating, and it is not a healthcare system, but rather a chaotic situation (Gaffney, 2020). This highlights the urgent need for a re-evaluation of the healthcare approach of neoliberal governments, as the current system is failing to provide adequate medical services to citizens. It is imperative that policymakers prioritize social safety nets for the impoverished and invest in the healthcare system to ensure that it is equipped to meet the needs of the population. Failure to do so will result in continued inadequacy and a decline in the overall health of the population.

One of the aspects of neoliberalism that contributes to the perpetuation of inequality and negatively impacts access to healthcare is the reduction of social services. The consequences of this phenomenon have been observed in the social realm, in addition to the health challenges that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the disparities between different socioeconomic classes, with the wealthy retreating to their yachts and second homes, the middle class transitioning to telecommuting, and the poor struggling to make ends meet. Many individuals in low-paying jobs, such as nurses, care workers, porters, bus drivers, and shopkeepers, either lost their income entirely or had to risk their lives daily to continue working. These individuals often live in cramped housing conditions, exacerbating the challenges they face. As these individuals are often considered part of the consumer class, it is unsurprising that the

statistics show a higher rate of mortality among the poor and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) populations (Lerner, 2020). The performance of neoliberal governments during the pandemic was criticized by Vicente Navarro, who argued that following neoliberal policies would be unwise. One of the key policies of neoliberal governments has been the privatization and commercialization of public services, which are essential for people's well-being (Peterson and Walker, 2022: 338). Furthermore, the reduction of social security measures in neoliberal governments has been shown to be detrimental to people's health, as access to healthcare, food, housing, and employment is crucial for maintaining well-being. The pandemic demonstrated that health costs were not optional, and that the transfer of funds from the private sector to the public budget was essential for global healthcare (Fox, Patel and Yates, 2021).

2. Corona and Political and Governance Challenges

The outbreak of the Coronavirus resulted in a range of political consequences, which posed unprecedented challenges for politicians. The initial phase of the pandemic witnessed a display of global unity, as political leaders entrusted scientific bodies at the international, supranational, and national levels to define measures to manage the spread of the virus. However, this phase was short-lived, as the politicization of science began to take shape, leading to debates about public health and economic preservation being manipulated by politicians with international influence, particularly those from neoliberal countries. The hydroxychloroquine debate was a prime example

of such political interventions, with most right-wing leaders supporting its use in the treatment of Corona (Alteri, et al. 2021: 12; Abbasi, 2020; Casarões and Magalhães, 2021).

While for decades, neoliberalism, which includes globalization and the world market, removing subsidies, ignoring social services, is one of its components; one of the dominant models of international relations has become, the accumulation of capital led by neoliberalism, has created a world in which the national survival of countries depends on competition in the global market (Neilson, 2021: 191). In the face of Corona, the discussion about the necessity of public investment in every country was put on the agenda again, and the austerity measures of the last decade caused by neoliberalism were openly criticized. Discussions also began on how governments should manage welfare and health systems. The need to improve tax collection and create solidarity and redistribution mechanisms has perhaps never been more apparent than the health and economic crisis that has fueled the budget deficit (Alteri, et al., 2021: 2).

Within the framework of neoliberalism, globalization and the world market are deemed crucial. This perspective posits that a country's viability is contingent upon its position within the globalized production and distribution chains, and the geopolitical rings it occupies. The uneven distribution of specialized components within the global networked production circuits, as well as varying shares of the global service chain, determine a country's level of dependence on this framework of global accumulation. Countries that rely on this system forfeit their local self-sufficiency, rendering them vulnerable to economic instability should they choose to close their borders (Neilson, 2022: 5). While the most effective means of preventing the spread of the

coronavirus at the national level was to maintain closed borders, the integrated hoarding system at the global level necessitates open borders. The pandemic exposed the limitations of this system of integrated accumulation during emergency situations, particularly for southern, less developed, or developing countries. This model is fragile, inflexible, and unreliable in safeguarding the interests of the people of these countries. Conversely, as the demand for health equipment and vaccines increased, countries that were proficient in the production and distribution chain began to prioritize their own interests, leading to a surge in nationalist tendencies. This self-centered approach prompted a reevaluation of the production and distribution chain, with many countries shifting towards self-sufficiency.

The international system faced a political challenge in the form of world leadership and hegemony. Concurrently, during the onset of the pandemic, the Communist Party of China convened a meeting of communist parties, with participation from 48 countries. During this meeting, Xi Jinping emphasized the need for closer cooperation, strengthened dialogue, and exchange of views based on the principles of "independence, equality, mutual respect, and non-interference in the internal affairs of others" (Alteri et al., 2021: 3). The emergence of China as a global player has challenged the leadership of the United States. Ian Bremmer, a professor of applied geopolitics at Columbia University, contends that the current challenge is the dissolution of the world system led by the United States and the absence of world leadership to intervene and play its role (Bremmer, 2020). Consequently, countries have shifted their focus to internal development in this new geopolitical situation. Some have argued that the developments of the pandemic had

led to inappropriate controversies for Chinese productions, with the United States behaving like a gangster by using masks and artificial breathing devices that it was not able to produce and stealing if bought. The United States also insulted other countries for being too weak to take timely and adequate measures, causing serious damage to the legitimacy of the American empire (Wright, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a further indication of the inadequacy of global politics. The competition between America, Europe, and China for national technological and economic support has left many countries without access to these resources, highlighting the severe discrimination present within the international community (Cronin, Doran, & Rough, 2020). In order to address this issue and move beyond the current vacuum of global leadership, Bremer (2020) identifies four key factors that must be considered. These include the economic disturbances and inequality caused by globalization, the emergence of "my country first" policies in advanced industrial democracies, the tendency of emerging superpowers and regional powers to undermine the efforts of successful democracies, and the decreasing efficiency and effectiveness of multilateral institutions. Additionally, the indifference of the Trump administration towards America's role in global leadership further exacerbated these issues, leading to a growing sentiment among Americans that the country shouldered too much of the burden in terms of military and other responsibilities.

The ideology of neoliberalism has had significant ramifications, including a reduction in the power of governments and the deliberate transfer of power to "unaccountable transnational

corporations." This approach has resulted in the outsourcing of services, with market forces becoming the dominant influence. As a result, the government's capacity to respond to the needs of its people and constituents has diminished, leading to disillusionment and helplessness among various segments of society (Pearse, 2021). The impact of this transformation is evident in the restructuring of the workforce of these corporations, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the limitations of this approach, particularly in the competition to produce vaccines and medical equipment, which many people were unable to afford. During a press conference in the White House, the Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States emphasized the role of the market in accelerating vaccine and therapeutic research and development, stating that the market provides solutions in terms of demand, purchase, and storage (Sachs, 2020). This perspective underscores the belief that the market can organize chaos. Seiji Yamada, a physician and professor of public health in Hawaii, noted how the coronavirus could expose human vulnerabilities by saturating them with the neoliberal order (Yamada, 2020).

3. Corona and Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought to light the inadequacies of the neoliberal growth model. Certain neoliberal governments demonstrated a reluctance to implement effective policies to address the pandemic, instead opting for rhetoric that justifies the sacrifice of human lives for the sake of economic sustainability. This resulted in vulnerable populations being exposed to

significant health risks. For instance, in May 2020, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson provided ambiguous policy advice, such as advising individuals to stay home if they feel unwell and avoid cruises if they are over 70, while limiting educational trips for students to other countries (Yong, 2020). In September 2020, as the second wave of infections began to rise, the UK government decided against imposing nationwide closures on businesses and services (McNally, 2020). Consequently, by the end of January 2021, when quarantine measures were finally implemented in business and educational institutions, the UK had recorded over 100,000 deaths. The executive head of the National Health Service in the UK noted that over 800 patients were being admitted daily, which was equivalent to the total capacity of a new hospital (Sim, 2021). The structural vulnerability of populations in neoliberal societies, including those who work in essential industries and those with underlying medical conditions, such as the elderly and patients who cannot work remotely, has been a significant factor in the consequences of policy decisions that prioritize economic benefits over human health and life (Ølgaard, 2020).

As previously noted, one of the significant accomplishments of neoliberalism and globalization in the realm of production is the establishment of global production chains. These chains are comprised of interconnected links that are formed in various parts of the world, based on the matching of labor productivity levels in different countries. The emergence of these chains was a response to mounting pressures on companies to reduce the costs of supplying their products. As a result, businesses began to design strategies that focused on establishing production in different regions through delocalization and subcontracting (Haren and Simchi-Levi 2020). Despite the

disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a halt in trade and a reduction in global investment, the crisis also resulted in the reproduction of supply networks in global value chains. This was accompanied by changes in global manufacturing and trade leadership on a larger scale (Maldonado and Moreno, 2020: 83).

The economic ramifications of the Corona crisis have proven to be more extensive and significant than previously anticipated, resulting in a greater financial burden on governments. As evidenced by initial reports on the United States, the economic loss due to the pandemic was projected to exceed 22 trillion dollars, with varying impacts on different industries across states due to quarantine measures and the urgency of safe reopening. This development exposed the vulnerability of the global network of financial markets, particularly government and corporate debt markets, with immediate contagion to the private banking sector. In essence, the core network of neoliberal financial governance institutions that has underpinned global financialization for the past four decades was shaken by the Corona epidemic. Large corporations were compelled to seek government's support, even for short periods, while countries reliant on export-oriented growth models faced with significant financial challenges. Central banks had resorted to direct financing of large corporations, providing selected investors with "helicopter money," which in some cases was immediately passed on to shareholders as dividends (Michelle, 2020; Das, 2021: 191; Maldonado and Moreno, 2020: 87; Kalu, 2020; Wood, 2020). The present policy is indicative of the central banks' acknowledgement of the inefficiencies inherent in neoliberal financing. The outbreak of the pandemic resulted in the loss of conservative rhetoric regarding the

indispensability of "fiscal discipline," owing to the government's apparent ability to generate funds ex nihilo and provide financial assistance to select sectors deemed "essential." Concurrently, the fallacy of individualism was exposed, as while one may evade the virus; there existed no personal solution to the catastrophe. An epidemic cannot be survived by a solitary organism, and it is the government's responsibility to mitigate the economic collapse, a fact that the left has always recognized and the British Prime Minister was compelled to acknowledge. The concept of society is a reality that cannot be ignored (Saunders, 2020). Economist Paul Mason characterizes neoliberalism as a doctrine that portrays the market as an autonomous mechanism beyond human control, which produces optimal outcomes for humans. Only when individuals interfere with it or attempt to impose conscious decision-making on it do they realize their error (Mason, 2020).

The current investigation sheds light on the industries that were most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2, 2020 to January 15, 2022. According to Vidović (2022), the top five industries that experienced the most significant effects were airlines, automobile manufacturing, energy equipment and services, hotels, restaurants, tourist and entertainment centers, and specialized retail stores. The wholesale and retail industry had been relatively less affected by the pandemic-induced national lockdowns, although the impact had been more pronounced on specialist and non-essential retail outlets. In the accommodation and food service industry, the beverage serving industry and hotels and similar accommodations industry experienced the most significant decline in turnover during the first half of 2020. Similarly, in the art industry, the entertainment and creative arts activities had been the most affected in terms of turnover reduction

(Chowdhury et al., 2022). The tourism sector was one of the hardest hit by the pandemic, as reported by the World Tourism Organization affiliated with the United Nations. The World Travel and Tourism Council also reported a significant decrease in global travel during the first three months of 2020. The travel restrictions imposed on tourists resulted in estimated losses of up to 3.1 trillion dollars of export earnings, according to Rostamali, Dehghan Puri, and Bagheri (2022:157).

Conclusion

The lingering effects of the 2008 financial market crisis persist to this day. However, the recent outbreak of the coronavirus has had a profound impact on the economic and political infrastructure, exacerbating the already existing wealth disparity between the rich and the poor. The global spread of the virus, coupled with the absence of a clear containment or cure strategy, prompted a re-examination of the ideological constructs derived from neoliberalism, which have been in place for the past forty years, including globalization and free trade. The coronavirus pandemic has presented significant identity and performance challenges for neoliberalism, casting doubt on its efficacy. Nevertheless, it is premature to declare the end of its role and presence in the political arena. However, the pandemic necessitated a constant shift in perspective, highlighting the deep challenges that the neoliberal system faces during global crises. In light of this, social security measures have been reduced in neoliberal governments. However, the coronavirus pandemic has underscored the importance of such measures in maintaining people's health by providing access to health services, food, housing, and employment. Countries have come to realize that health costs are not optional, and that the transfer of funds from the private sector to the public budget is essential for global healthcare.

In the realm of governance, the COVID-19 pandemic has reignited discussions regarding the necessity of public investment in every country. The austerity measures implemented over the past decade due to neoliberalism have been openly criticized. Additionally, there have been discussions on how governments should manage welfare and health systems. The current health and economic crisis have highlighted the need to improve tax collection and create solidarity and redistribution mechanisms to address the budget deficit. The COVID-19 crisis has also exposed the weaknesses of the neoliberalism growth machine in the field of industry. The five industries most affected by the pandemic from January 2, 2020 to January 15, 2022 were airlines, automobile manufacturing, energy equipment and services, hotels, restaurants, tourist and entertainment centers, and specialized retail stores. It is evident that critical social transformation is needed now more than ever in the face of these crises. The economic and governmental system of neoliberalism is under tension, and the cracks have become apparent to the desperate people. We are on the brink of global shock events that may serve as a gateway for significant social changes leading to a more equitable society. However, immediate action is necessary to make this a reality.


Bibliography

- [1] Abbasi, Kamran. (2020). Covid-19: politicisation, "corruption," and suppression of science. *BMJ: British Medical Journal* (Online). <https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4425>.
- [2] Algarín, Evaristo Barrera, Francisco Estepa Maestre, José Luis Sarasola-Sánchez Serrano, and Ana Vallejo Andrada. (2020). "COVID-19, neoliberalism and health systems in 30 European countries: relationship to deceases." *Rev Esp Salud Pública* 1-15.
- [3] Alteri, Luca, Louisa Parks, Luca Raffini, and Tommaso Vitale. (2021). "Covid-19 and the Structural Crisis of Liberal Democracies. Determinants and Consequences of the Governance of Pandemic." *Partecipazione e conflitto* 14 (1): 1-37.
- [4] Alwan, Nisreen, and et al. (2020). "Scientific consensus on the COVID-19 pandemic: we need to act now." *The Lancet* 396: e71-e72. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32153-X/fulltext#:~:text=It%20is%20critical%20to%20act,been%20amplified%20by%20the%20pandemic](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32153-X/fulltext#:~:text=It%20is%20critical%20to%20act,been%20amplified%20by%20the%20pandemic).
- [5] Aschwanden, Christie. (2020). "The false promise of herd immunity for COVID-19." *Nature* 26-28.
- [6] Beals, Ann Marie, and et al. (2023). The COVID-19 Crisis: Using the Cracks in Neoliberalism for Social Transformation Towards a More Just Society. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*. <https://www.gjcpp.org/en/article.php?issue=45&article=279>.
- [7] Braw, Elizabeth. (2020). The EU Is Abandoning Italy in Its Hour of Need. *Foreign Policy*.
- [8] Bremmer, Ian. (2020). We Are in a Geopolitical Recession. That's a Bad Time for the Global Coronavirus Crisis. *Time*. <https://time.com/5802033/geopolitical-recession-global-crisis/>
- [9] Casarões, Guilherme, and David Magalhães. (2021). "The hydroxychloroquine alliance: how far-right leaders and alt-science preachers came together to promote a miracle drug." *Revista de Administração Pública* 55: 197-214.
- [10] CDC. (2019). 1918 Pandemic (H1N1 virus). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD).
- [11] Chalk, James. (2021). "Neoliberalism and personal freedoms during COVID-19." *Journal of Global Faultlines* 8 (1): 91-99.
- [12] Chowdhury, Dey, Muhammed Khaliq, Ginevra Okoye, and Libby Abrahams. (2022). Effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on "high-contact" industries. Office for National Statistics.
- [13] Cronin, Patrick M, Michael Doran, and Peter Rough. (2020). Geopolitical Implications of the Coronavirus. *Geopolitical Implications of the Coronavirus*. <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/geopolitical-implications-of-the-coronavirus>.
- [14] Das, Subashish. (2021). "Impact of COVID-19 on industries." In *COVID-19 in the Environment*, by Deepak Rawtani, Chaudhery Mustansar Hussain and Nitasha Khatri, 191-200. Elsevier.
- [15] Fox, Ashley, Vikram Patel, and Robert Yates. (2021). As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, universal health coverage (UHC) is a goal that the world can't afford to miss. Webinar Engage in the political economy of universal health coverage.
- [16] Friedman, Milton. (1951). "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects." *Farmand* 89-93.
- [17] Gaffney, Adam. (2020). America's extreme neoliberal healthcare system is putting the country at risk. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/21/medicare-for-all-coronavirus-covid-19-single-payer>.

- [18] Haren, Pierre, and David Simchi-Levi. (2020). "How Coronavirus Could Impact the Global Supply Chain by Mid-March." *Harvard Business Review*.
- [19] Hasan, Ali. (2020). *Capitalism Versus Coronavirus*. The Intercept.
- [20] Heenan, Natasha, and Anna Sturman. (2020). "Labor, nature, capitalism and COVID-19." *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 193-199.
- [21] Horgan, John. (2020). *The Coronavirus and Right-Wing Postmodernism*. Scientific American. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/the-coronavirus-and-right-wing-postmodernism/>
- [22] Hosseini, Sayyed Hossein (2023) "A Methodological Analysis of the Concept of Critique " *The International Journal of Humanities* Vol. 30 (1): 22-38
- [23] Kalu, Bernard. (2020). COVID-19 in Nigeria: a disease of hunger. *The Lancet*. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30220-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30220-4/fulltext)
- [24] Lerner, Sharon. (2020). Coronavirus numbers reflect New York City's deep economic divide. *The Intercept*. <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/09/nyc-coronavirus-deaths-race-economic-divide/>
- [25] Madani Ghahfarokhi, Saeid; Mohammadi Ghareghani, Mohammad Ali (2019) "Justice in New Social Movements" *The International Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 26 (1): 1-13
- [26] Maldonado, Luis Kato, and Guadalupe Huerta Moreno. (2020). "COVID-19 and the Hyper-Crisis of Neoliberalism: The Breakdown of Financialization." *Briq* 1 (3): 81-91.
- [27] Mason, Paul. (2020). Will coronavirus signal the end of capitalism? *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/4/3/will-coronavirus-signal-the-end-of-capitalism/>
- [28] Matthewman, Steve, and Kate Huppatz. (2020). "A sociology of Covid-19." *Journal of Sociology* 56 (4): 1-9.
- [29] McNally, Alan. (2020). Backers of 'herd immunity' shouldn't have been allowed near Boris Johnson. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/14/herd-immunity-boris-johnson-coronavirus>
- [30] Michell, Jo. (2020). Coronavirus Reveals the Cost of Austerity. *Tribune*. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/04/coronavirus-reveals-the-cost-of-austerity>
- [31] Mirowski, Philip, and Dieter Plehwe. (2009). *The road from Mont Pèlerin: the making of the neoliberal thought*. Harvard University Press.
- [32] Mitropoulos, Angela. (2020). *Pandemonium: Proliferating borders of capital and the pandemic swerve*. Pluto Press.
- [33] Navarro, Vicente. (2022). "The Consequences of Neoliberalism in the Current Pandemic." *International Journal of Health Services* 50 (3): 271-275.
- [34] Neilson, David. (2021). "Reversing the catastrophe of neoliberal-led global capitalism in the time of coronavirus: Towards a democratic socialist alternative." *Capital & Class* 45 (2): 191-213.
- [35] Neilson, David. (2022). "Learning for the Future beyond COVID-19: A Critical Alternative to the Neoliberal Model of Development." *Societies* 12 (32): 1-14.
- [36] Neysani Samani, Najmeh; Farrokhi Anari, Mehdi (2022) "A Methodological Analysis of the Concept of Critique " *The International Journal of Humanities* Vol. 29 (4): 23-35.
- [37] Nune, João. (2020). "The COVID-19 pandemic: securitization, neoliberal crisis, and global vulnerabilization." *Cad. Saúde Pública* 36 (5)
- [38] Ølgaard, D. (2020). Reflections on Naomi Klein's pandemic shock doctrine. *E-International Relations*, 74-75. <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/09/15/reflections-on-naomi-kleins-pandemic-shock-doctrine/>
- [39] Pearce, William. (2021). *A Critique of Neoliberalism. The Career Site For Economists*. <https://inomics.com/insight/a-critique-of-neoliberalism-1379580>
- [40] Peters, Charles. (1982). *A Neo-Liberal's Manifesto*. The Washington Post. <https://coreyobin.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Charles-Peters-Neoliberalism.pdf>
- [41] Peterson, Chris L, and Christine Walker. (2022). "Universal health care and political economy, neoliberalism and effects of COVID-19: A view of systems and complexity." *J Eval Clin Pract* 28 (2): 338-340.
- [42] Rezaei Eskandari, Davood. (2005) "The evolution of the concept of the state in theories of international relations." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 8 (1): 106-134.
- [43] Risager, Bjarke Skærlund. (2016). *Neoliberalism Is a Political Project: An Interview with David Harvey*. Jacobin. <https://jacobin.com/2016/07/david-harvey-neoliberalism-capitalism-labor-crisis-resistance/>
- [44] Rodrik, Dani. (2017). "The fatal flaw of neoliberalism: it's bad economics." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/14/the-fatal-flaw-of-neoliberalism-its-bad-economics>
- [45] Rostamali, Reihaneh, Hourieh Dehghan Puri, and Hadi Bagheri. (2022) "Developments and strategies of the sports tourism industry during the covid-19 epidemic." *Research in sports management and movement behavior* 12 (24): 154-177.
- [46] Sachs, Jeffrey. (2020). The Trump administration's ludicrous approach to coronavirus vaccine. *CNN*.
- [47] Saunders, Robert. (2020). There is such a thing as society: has Boris Johnson repudiated Thatcherism? *The New Statesman*. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/03/boris-johnson-thatcher-society-no-such-thing-policies>
- [48] Sim, B. (2021). London hospitals in 'serious' situation with 800 new COVID-19 patients admitted daily. *Financial News*. <https://www.ft.com/content/6bf817cf-9ee6-4231-8f04-e86ae68bf0c6>
- [49] Solty, Ingar. (2021). "The Five Opportunities of the Covid-19 Bio-Economic Pandemic." In *Beyond Capitalism and Neoliberalism*, by Vesna Stanković Pejnović, 72-83. Belgrade: Institute for Political Studies.
- [50] Vidovic, Luka. (2022). Industries Most and Least Impacted by COVID-19 from a Probability of Default Perspective - January 2022 Update. *S&P Global Market Intelligence*. <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/blog/industries-most-and-least-impacted-by-covid-19-from-a-probability-of-default-perspective-january-2022-update>
- [51] West, Cornel. (2016). Goodbye, American Neoliberalism. A New Era is Here". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/17/american-neoliberalism-cornel-west-2016-election>
- [52] Wheeler, Duncan. (2020). Vox in the Age of Covid-19. *Journal of International Affairs*, 173-184. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/vox-age-covid-19-populist-protest-turn-spanish-politics>
- [53] Wood, Zoe. (2020). Tesco defends £635m dividend payout after coronavirus tax break. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/08/tesco-sales-up-30-per-cent-because-of-pre-lockdown-stockpiling-coronavirus>
- [54] Wrenn, Mary (2014) 'Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism' *Panoeconomicus* 61(4):503-515
- [55] Wright, Bruce C.T. (2020). U.S. Accused Of Stealing Ventilators From Barbados As Coronavirus Spreads In The Caribbean. *news one*. <https://newsone.com/3924158/barbados-accuses-us-ventilators-seized/>
- [56] Yamada, Seiji. (2020). *Neoliberalism and the Coronavirus. Counterpunch*.
- [57] Yong, Ed. (2020). The UK's coronavirus 'herd immunity' debacle. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-pandemic-herd-immunity-uk-boris-johnson/608065/>

همه‌گیری کرونا و نئولیبرالیسم



زهرا احمدی^۱ 

چکیده

بیماری همه‌گیر ناشی از گسترش سریع ویروس کرونا یا همان کووید-۱۹ اثراتی فراتر از موارد مرتبط با سلامتی را نشان داده است. در واقع، این بیماری، خود را به‌عنوان چیزی که دانشمندان آن را «واقعیت اجتماعی کل» می‌نامند، تثبیت کرده است، یعنی رویدادی که بر تک تک جنبه‌های جامعه تأثیر می‌گذارد. این بیماری همه‌گیر نه تنها زندگی و رفتار روزمره ما را عمیقاً تغییر داده است، بلکه تأثیرات اقتصادی و سیاسی گسترده‌ای داشته و همچنان پیامدهای آن نیز ادامه خواهد داشت. از این رو، مقاله پیش‌رو در صدد است تا نشان دهد همه‌گیری کرونا چگونه نئولیبرالیسم را که از دهه ۱۹۸۰ یکی از گفتمان‌های غالب روابط بین‌الملل و حکومت‌ها شده تحت تأثیر خود قرار داده است. این پژوهش با استفاده از منابع کتابخانه‌ای و به روش تحلیلی-توصیفی نگاشته شده است. نتایج این مقاله نشان می‌دهد که همه‌گیری کرونا خلأ اخلاقی و شکست‌های اقتصادی را در قلب الگوی «توسعه» مبتنی بر نئولیبرالیسم که از دهه ۱۹۸۰ بر روابط اقتصادی جهانی مسلط بوده است، آشکار کرده است. نئولیبرالیسم به جای اینکه سیاست و اقتصاد را در خدمت شهروندان قرار دهد، کارگران را وادار کرده است تا به نیازهای بازار خدمت کنند. در عین حال، نئولیبرالیسم خدمات عمومی، به ویژه مراقبت‌های بهداشتی را در برابر چالش‌های ویروس کرونا تبعیض‌آمیز کرده است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: کرونا، نئولیبرالیسم، اقتصاد، نظام بهداشتی، چالش حکمرانی.

^۱ دانشجوی دکتری روابط بین‌الملل،
دانشکده حقوق، الهیات و علوم
سیاسی، واحد علوم و تحقیقات،
دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تهران، ایران
E-mail: za.ahmadi1370@gmail.com