

How Freedom Can Survive This Pandemic – With Your Help

There are not many possible outcomes in which humans become freer after the COVID-19 pandemic. Already Western governments (see: United States) are taking unprecedented powers and violating civil liberties on a mass scale, despite farcical mismanagement of the crisis. Countries already well along the authoritarian road are openly embracing dictatorship (see: Hungary) or violent suppression (see: the Philippines, China).

The stay-at-home orders and lockdowns have probably made you feel powerless to help fight either this pandemic or the emerging fascistic orders. But there is plenty we can do. This list is just a start:

Make yourself more resilient

Are you isolated? Very well. Become a stronger individual. Do things which will reduce your dependence on the people who would run your life.

- **Wear masks in public (and practice physical distancing):** Protect other people from transmission of the virus by wearing a mask. You may be a carrier without having any symptoms. Stay at least 6 ft. away from others, and limit unnecessary travel. All the basics: don't make things worse for yourself or others.
- **Stay fit:** Eat well and exercise and monitor your own health.
- **Prepare for shortages:** It's a bit late in the game to "stock up", but supplies of some things are still plentiful relative to supplies in a few weeks. Don't hoard, but at least make sure you have enough for yourself and your family to avoid the bread lines.
- **Keep some cash:** Having cash (rather than debt) right now will be a source of optionality. The more cash you have, the longer you can resist the dole.
- **Get good at doing things yourself:** Whether you're making a mask or raising chickens or building a home gym, you're going to have to do a lot of things yourself, or else do without. You'll have to fix a lot of things.
- **Learn self-defense, and get the tools for it:** This virus will be making traditional police forces both weaker (due to sickness) and more dangerous (due to new levels of power and nosiness). You would be well advised to learn gun safety, get a gun, and maybe acquire some other self-defense skills (such as a martial art).

Strengthen voluntary communities

Even strong individuals will look outward for help. We can let them turn to dictators and/or bureaucrats, or we can make voluntary associations and the voluntary institutions of civil society strong enough to meet the demand.

- **Help your neighbors:** Your neighbors will be suffering too, whether from loneliness or from actual need. Donate to your food bank, send food or supplies to your local medical workers, volunteer if you can do so safely, and bring groceries for your older neighbors.
- **Support small businesses:** The more independent entrepreneurs survive this crisis, the fewer the people forced toward welfare-dependency, government work, or employment for the crony corporations.
- **Create value:** Entrepreneurs who can build new technologies and businesses to help during this pandemic will be doing a great deal for freedom, even if they don't speak about politics at all. Growth and innovation are their own arguments for liberty, and private initiative to solve social problems will be a clear counter-example to the corruption and incompetence of bureaucracy.
- **Make churches and community groups work well remotely:** You must find a way to transition traditional mass gatherings into forms of peer to peer connections. Livestreams won't be enough. People need interaction. Consider group video calls, group chats, email threads, etc. for the communities you care about, and keep interaction going.

Organize and foster dissenting voices

Shutdowns and lockdowns create perfect opportunities for petty tyrants to rule isolated individuals – unless we find each other online. We will have to organize regardless of the distance:

- **Connect with fellow freedom-lovers:** Reach out to your friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who are likely to share a concern for political liberty. Find people you can trust and people who will be willing to stand alongside you in protest and even disobedience. There may be differing levels of interest or commitment as well as different ideological orientations – that's fine. Work with people where they are, and build a coalition of people who care.
- **Share information:** Watch and share important news about the pandemic and government overreach. Curate from many sources. Take the pandemic seriously and avoid fake news.
- **Speak out:** I'm generally cynical on the value of political speech, but you never know how you might shift what someone else is willing to accept from their government. Say something. Share why bailouts are destructive of economic welfare, criticize police harassment of solo beach walkers, point out the illegality of business shutdown by state fiat, etc. Share how deregulation of a choked medical industry is helping, and how free people working together have often bested government solutions.

Prepare for active dissent and disobedience

More steps toward tyranny have happened in the past few weeks than have happened in a year, or so it seems. As economies quickly degrade and social unrest rises, governments will claim more power which they may use against dissidents in the name of safety. And if lockdowns on travel, free assembly, and free enterprise continue, civil disobedience will be both just and necessary (if more dangerous). So it's not a bad idea to be prepared for further crackdowns by paranoid governments, as well as the risk of being libertarian in that eventuality:

- **Do the anti-surveillance basics:** The surveillance state will probably take this opportunity to reveal itself fully. Make things harder for it, at least. Encrypt your chats using an app like Signal, encrypt your emails using PGP, and remember that your devices' microphones and cameras might be watching/listening to you (block them if you can).
- **Reduce dependence on anti-privacy platforms:** Platforms like Google, however well-intentioned, seem to have no qualms about making your data (location, etc) available to governments. Facebook certainly won't mind turning over your communications if doing so can be justified by "the emergency."
- **Reduce dependence on censorship-oriented platforms:** Twitter recently announced its intention to remove tweets contradicting "expert" information about COVID-19, at a time when "experts" were still claiming that masks were ineffective (they now acknowledge masks' usefulness). These platforms may continue to make terrible editorial/censorial decisions as economies .
- **Learn your legal rights:** It has become a meme, but you should know how to challenge police officers for violation of the 4th amendment (and other rights). Consider the possibility that you may be arrested either for something as silly as going outside or for deliberate disobedience of business shut-down orders.

This pandemic will pass. The authoritarian gains made now will remain for a long time. But if we act early and often, we can thwart a lot of it, give the state some black eyes and PR nightmares, and maybe even eke out some victories for freedom.

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