

The Root Cause of the Failure of American COVID-19 Governance Based on the Criticism of Liberal Democracy From Error-Tolerant Democracy

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Liberal democracy cannot help America govern COVID-19 effectively for liberalism's misunderstanding of the concept of liberty. Error-tolerantism divides liberty into the right to liberty in innovative fields, the right to be wrong as an original right, and the right to be right in non-innovative ones as sub-rights; rights come from mutual empowerment among people. The major defects of liberal democracy from the perspective of error-tolerant democracy constructed on error-tolerantism are as follows: The essence of election is to transfer people's right to be wrong and corresponding right to be right to politicians, but the separation and balance of powers does not evaluate whether presidents, states, mayors, et al., have exercised the power to be wrong reasonably, so that they could even abuse it in the COVID-19 governance, and did great harm to people's human rights without any accountability or impeachment. Democratic governor' power to be wrong authorized by election was deprived by President Trump through issuing false information in the COVID-19 governance and encouraging people to protest against the anti-pandemic laws, which made liberal democracy in the United States threatened and COVID-19 out of control.

Keywords: COVID-19, liberalism, liberal democracy, error-tolerantism, error-tolerant democracy

Introduction

Whether liberal democracy contributed to the COVID-19 governance was a hot topic in 2020 ("Democracy and Rise of Authoritarianism in COVID-19 World", 2020). At the end of January, 2020, when COVID-19 witnessed the lockdown of Wuhan City, the West generally agreed that China lacked freedom of speech and the inertia of a rigid bureaucratic structure, and the national censorship system kept the whistle blower Dr. Wenliang Li silent, which led to the disease out of control (Mérieau, 2020). Democracies' confidence mainly came from Amartya Sen's research on the famine. Sen (1999) has claimed that no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press and there is no exception to this rule. Citizens in democracies can expect governments to be more candid, transparent, and responsible in dealing with all kinds of crises, which authoritarian countries usually cannot (Berengaut, 2020; Bollyky & Kickbusch, 2020). So Steve Bloomfield (2020) has regarded that if China had a free press and transparent government, the pandemic could be brought under control before the outbreak. In

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conclusion, freedom plus democracy equals the COVID-19 antidote according to Western standards, although Wilson and Wisongye have found that social media rumors can exploit the right to freedom of speech and erode people's health benefits (New York Times, 2021; Bollyky & Kickbusch, 2020). However, since March, 2020, with Western democracies seriously affected by COVID-19, their superiority of the political system has begun to expose its untrue and fatal defects. Especially when Wuhan began to lift its blockade on April 8, 2020 (People.cn, 2020), scholars and journalists began to question whether democracies had the ability to deal with the crisis better than China (Mérieau, 2020). Liberal democracy in the United States has not proved that it is more conducive to the COVID-19 governance than authoritarianism since 2020. From a global perspective, not only do most democracies fail to contain the spread of COVID-19, but almost all of the 10 most affected countries are liberal democracies (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). Their policy responses have a poor effect in reducing the death toll in early stages of the crisis, as shown that democratic political institutions may be at a disadvantage in responding quickly to COVID-19 (Cepaluni, Dorsch, & Branyiczki, 2020).

More surprising is that the COVID-19 pandemic is so serious in the United States, yet no government officials have been removed from office because of their inactivity in fighting against the corona-virus. People doubt whether American accountability mechanism is still working. However, two impeachments against President Trump indicate that it seems to function quite well (Valenta & Valenta, 2017; Herb, Raju, Fox, & Mattingly, 2021). The direct loss to the United States caused by Russiagate and incitement of insurrection is far less than the pain caused by the failure of the COVID-19 governance, but no any official in the United States is responsible for it. If it again faces infectious diseases similar to COVID-19, will it repeat this unprecedented tragedy? Can liberal democracy and the separation and balance of powers push American president to act more aggressively? Error-tolerantism explains that the fundamental reason for the failure of American COVID-19 governance is a serious misunderstanding of the concept of freedom (Zhou, 2018; 2019; Zhou, Tan, & Liu, 2020). Liberalism has witnessed a rare scene: In the context of COVID-19, the president, governors, magistrates, and the public (Emery, Schwebke, & Park, 2020; Sullum, 2020; Behrmann, 2020; Kenton, 2020; Strano, 2020) have severe misunderstanding of freedom that cost more than American 600,000 lives (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021).

In response to the above phenomenon, error-tolerantism as the development of liberalism defines liberty from a new perspective and shows a stronger explanatory power than liberalism (Zhou et al., 2020). The right paradigm of error-tolerantism, the right to be wrong (right to trial and error) as an original right and mutual empowerment theory, instead of natural rights theory and social contract theory, divides liberty into the right to liberty in innovative fields, right to be wrong as an original right, and the right to be right in non-innovative fields as sub-rights. The lockdown of Wuhan means that Chinese government has excised the power to be wrong as an original power, but the West criticized it with the right to liberty at the level of sub-rights, which is the first error in understanding liberty during American COVID-19 governance; after Wuhan effectively controlled COVID-19, its governance has transformed from an innovative field to a non-innovative one. Then, liberties in non-innovative fields as the sub-rights level, such as wearing face masks, keeping social distancing, showing health codes, are formed definitely (Zhou et al., 2020). However, wearing masks has been regarded as a sign of political oppression rather than a simple hygienic measure by the United States (Kahanel, 2021). Since liberalism has a major misunderstanding of the concept of liberty, liberal democracy based on the philosophy of liberalism should be deeply reflected or even reconstructed, and it is very reasonable for error-tolerant democracy constructed based on error-tolerantism to explore the defects of liberal democracy in American

COVID-19 governance. Therefore, we first review scholars' relevant research on American democracy and the COVID-19 governance, and then based on the theory of error-tolerant democracy, discuss the defects of liberal democracy and American political system that are unable to cope with the crisis of the century.

Literature Review

In the face of COVID-19, will democracy doom the West or save them (Binghamton University, 2020)? Definitely, COVID-19 has exposed the weakness of the West, and the problem is how to fix it (Friedman, 2020). Fukuyama believes that the failure of the COVID-19 governance does not mean the end of liberal democracy (Mandeville, 2020), but Frey, Presidente, and Chen (2020) worry that COVID-19 could turn the decline of democracy into a great depression, and authoritarianism might sweep the world like a pandemic. COVID-19 can be considered as a major test for the world, especially for liberal democracy in the United States. Scholars have been trying to explain why liberal democracy cannot help the United States defeat it.

Firstly, how the United States maintain democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic is the most enormous challenge, especially when the wave of systematic racism and police brutality possibly has triggered the biggest protest in American history, which led its COVID-19 governance to a secondary level (Brannen, Ahmed, & Newton, 2020), so COVID-19 might have eroded the United States (Bieber, 2020; Diamond, 2020). Evan Gerstmann (2020) sums up the influence of COVID-19 on liberal democracy from four aspects, namely, enhanced surveillance powers, suspension of rights, control over information, and delayed elections (Milligan, 2020), which is totally different from some American politicians who have suggested COVID-19 as a reason for banning protests, postponing elections, and adjourning Congress (Vazquez & Mattingly, 2020). Larry Diamond (2020) believes that if authoritarian China, rather than democratic America, ultimately defeats COVID-19 globally, China's political system will be more legitimate, thus affecting Western freedom, democracy, and autonomy. For David Litt (2020), American representative government is no longer as representative as it used to be. In the past four decades, the response of American leaders to the public interest has been greatly reduced. Moritz Koch (2020) admits the failure of Western democracy, because of mismanagement, disagreement, the combination of civil strife, and the corruption of democratic rules in liberal democracies, is ultimately incapable of resisting the invasion of COVID-19.

Freedom House (Repucci & Slipowit, 2020) discusses the impact of COVID-19 on global democracy from five aspects, i.e., "abuses of power, protection of vulnerable groups, transparency and anti-corruption, free media and expression, and credible elections". Among them, American democracy has also regressed in the above five aspects. Cornelia Meyer (2020) explains the reason why COVID-19 is a threat to democracy is that authoritarian regime is more likely to contain the spread of COVID-19. Howard Freedlander (2020) regards that COVID-19 dims democracy that must yield to serious and possibly deadly health concerns, so the crisis may be seen as an opportunity to prove the adaptability of authoritarianism and the failure of democratic leadership (Abdo, 2020). Stiglitz (2020) notes that since the 1980s, the establishment of neo-liberalism in the United States has weakened liberal democracy and is detrimental to the COVID-19 governance.

Secondly, although there are many doubts about liberal democracy, most of American scholars still do their utmost to defend or even develop it. Serge Schmemmann (2020) cherishes the value of American democracy in which transparency can help American people expose false information and ask the government to respond to COVID-19. Katulis and Sutton (2020) claim that the United States must successfully curb the damage of COVID-19 to public health and the economy, as crucial to prove that democracy is a better model in

the world. Wendy Weiser thinks that COVID-19 is a double-edged sword for democracy, because there is an opportunity not only to renew national unity and national commitment to democracy, but people may undermine or erode democracy by taking advantage of the confusion and fear surrounding COVID-19 (Milligan, 2020). Steve Bloomfield (2020) positively says that in a system based on the right of the people to criticize and change the way of governance, the periodic collapses in confidence are not so much a defect as an occasionally dangerous feature. Martha Roby (2020) emphasizes that America would not allow COVID-19 to shake their democracy, because it is built on a strong set of principles that shapes its nation and guides American people for nearly 250 years. For Lauri Rapeli and Inga Saikkonen (2020), they believe that COVID-19 will not have serious long-term effects on mature democracies. Susan Corke (2020) upholds the belief that the values of freedom and democracy are the source of American strength and unity, especially when they're confronted with the challenge of COVID-19.

Haluk Alkan (2020) discusses that the state's new role, such as democratic accountability and state capacity, needs to be redefined after COVID-19 pandemic. McIvor et al. (2021) have mentioned civic sadness because of recognition that USA is a democracy in need of repair. Yordanos Eyoel (2020) recognizes that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the breakdown of our current paradigm, but it also provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to build a democratic renaissance for the people and by the people based on the trust of citizens. Susan Corke (2020) has thought that in recovering from such a complex crisis that requires public trust and the whole social response, democratic countries have a stronger arsenal than autocratic governments that can quickly take drastic measures to fight COVID-19 in the short term.

Thirdly, President Trump as a populist has failed to govern COVID-19, creating opportunities for the restoration of liberal democracy. Kamran Abbasi (2020) insists that the evidence that democracy is good for health be fully confirmed, but President and ruling groups have used democracy to gain power and then abused it to retain power, as leads to a failure of the US governmental system beyond Trump's personal failure (Agnew, 2020). Daron Acemoglu (2020) points out that the failure of the COVID-19 governance was for America's transition from democracy to autocracy. Danielle Allen (Stanton, 2020) says that President Trump cared about politics and his popularity instead of governance that is the key to defeat COVID-19, so the vacuum in presidential leadership was evident in governing the pandemic (Dombrowski, 2020). After the 2016 election, Trump completely ignored the disaster of the United States caused by COVID-19 and as his GOP enablers made it worse (Parton, 2020). Samuel Brannen et al. (2020) regard that COVID-19 may prove to be a restorative moment for democracy, especially exposing the ineffectiveness of political populism. Thomas L. Friedman (2020) has criticized Trump's political strategy for re-election, to divide American, destroy trust and truth, and declare any news hostile to his goals as "fake", which indicates that a vulgar populist pro-capitalist ideology in the American election competition may be in a desperate struggle (Hryce, 2020). Reflecting on the harm done to the public during President Trump's governance of COVID-19, Jill Long Thompson (2020) realizes that leadership based on democratic values, such as truthfulness, justice, and temperance, can save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans. Chris Hedges (2020) notices that after Trump left office, he left behind a political party that was an open dictatorship, defied democratic norms, opposed scientific and fact based discourse, and attempted to launch a coup. Chauncey Devega (2020) regards that Donald Trump has been abusing American people for at least four years by finance and emotion. Francis Fukuyama (2020) notes that the evolution from liberalism to neo-liberalism after the 1980s has greatly reduced the policy space available to the political leaders of the middle group, and led to the growth of huge inequality, which has been fueling the

populism of the left and right groups. Matthew Rozsa (2021) describes another picture that during Trump's presidency, the United States fell into dictatorship. Frank-Walter Steinmeier as President of Germany emphasizes that lies, divisiveness and democracy thwarting, hatred even from the highest levels is an attack on liberal democracy in general, because of populism (Grobe, 2021).

In summary, the United States has failed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and a series of questions needed to be answered for America: Why can't liberal democracy save America? What kind of new democratic theoretical system is urgently needed in Western countries headed by the United States? How can the United States rebuild its systematical and theoretical confidence within the framework of freedom and democracy? When the next crisis comes, how can the United States prove that democracy is the best political system to fight it rather than authoritarian? Without clarifying those issues, it is impossible to figure out whether the reform of the US political system is comprehensive or partial. Here error-tolerant democracy tries to reveal the major defects of liberal democracy.

The Theory of Error-Toleratism and Error-Tolerant Democracy

In the process of constructing the theory of error-tolerantism, we have realized that since the trial-and-error method expounded by Karl Popper (1979) is the fundamental scientific method, it should also be the basic characteristics of human beings in the state of nature, which is the starting point of liberalism (Locke, 1967; Rousseau, 1924). In the state of nature integrated with trial and error, human concepts—such as the concept of human rights—are unknown. In other words, the right to life, the right to property and even various concepts in modern science are unknown or undefined. Human concept is conceived by trial-and-error practices, and improved through subsequent trial-and-error practices (Zhou, 2018; 2019; Zhou et al., 2020). If an individual or organization can monopolize the qualification of trial-and-error practices, that is, the right to trial-and-error practices (the right to trial and error or right to be wrong), then they have the opportunity to define various concepts of mankind in accordance with their own interests, including the connotation of the right to life and property etc. In this sense, the right to trial and error or right to be wrong has the nature of matriarchy: New ideas are born because of it, and old ideas die out because of it. Different people hold the right to be wrong as an original right, and the concept of sub-rights will also change. What needs to be explained is that in a democratic society, the power of political elites comes from rights transferred from the people. Therefore, power has the same attributes as right. That is, the right to be wrong as an original right means that the power to be wrong is also an original power.

For instance, if slave masters hold the power to be wrong, they can define slaves as talking animals; After feudal monarchs have the power to be wrong, they abolish slavery, and the idea of monarch power conferred by God is regarded as legal. Chinese monarchs with the biggest power to be wrong have thought that all lands under heaven belong to the king, and all the people are the king's servants. That is to say, lands, people, and ministers are emperors' private property, and the opposite ideas are restrained or abolished. When the bourgeoisie catches the right or power to be wrong, the concept of natural rights theory and social contract theory are accepted (Zhou et al., 2020). On the other hand, human rights for error-tolerantism are not gifts from God, but a result of mutual empowerment among people. In conclusion, the right paradigm of error-tolerantism is the right to be wrong as an original right and mutual empowerment theory.

In a democratic society, everyone has the equal right to be wrong and the corresponding right to be right, which is the first mutual empowerment that people empower each other. Secondly, for the sake of efficiency,

people are willing to transfer their rights to be wrong and corresponding rights to be right to elites in various fields. At the same time, elites in various fields should empower and benefit people. In political fields, how can elites obtain the power to be wrong and the power to be right? The best way is through a fair electoral system. After political elites obtain the power to be wrong and the corresponding power to be right, they should also empower people sub-rights and benefit them profits. This is a way of trading one right for rights: The right to be wrong is “one”, and after it is transferred, people must be empowered “many rights”: right to education, freedom in non-innovative fields, supervision, and other rights, which can be regarded as the second mutual empowerment and reflects the characteristics of the right to be wrong as an original right, because once it is transferred out, the people should have to obtain various rights to make up for the loss. Therefore, error-tolerant democracy can be defined as follows: In modern nation-state, people authorize their rights to be wrong (right to trial and error) as an original right and corresponding right to be right to political elites by election, in order to obtain corresponding profit and subordinate rights, such as right to life, education, and criticism etc. In the process of managing state affairs, political elites have powers to be wrong protected by the law and perform their obligations of criticism, self-criticism in public and must ensure that errors can be effectively shared, corrected, and searched at the systematic level and thus perfect the governmental organization itself (Zhou, 2019).

President Trump Deprived the Power to Be Wrong of State Governors in the COVID-19 Governance, Which Made American Democracy Threatened and the Pandemic out of Control

In 1942, Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1954) defined competitive election as the heart of democracy. Later, through the development of Robert Dahl (1982), Sartori (1987), and other scholars, a fairly systematic and complete theory of liberal democracy has been established. In the face of COVID-19, politicians and theorists worry that the delay in elections will pose a challenge to liberal democracy (Milligan, 2020). Electoral democracy, the first step of democracy by error-tolerant democracy, represents Western main political practices, but it only expresses the external forms of Western democratic practice, without knowing that elections are the process of transferring the right to be wrong in innovative fields and the corresponding right to be right in non-innovative ones to political elites. Then how presidents, state governors, and mayors et al. exercise the powers to be wrong and to be right, and perform obligations of criticism, self-criticism in public and corrections of their errors is the second step of democracy, as embodies the governance democracy. Electoral democracy just focuses too much on formal democracy, but neglects the substantive content, obligation of politicians to accept people’s criticism and exercise self-criticism in public and to correct errors with people’s supervision in order to let them exercise the power to be wrong reasonably.

In non-innovative fields, American liberal democracy has laws and institutions to follow and has a strong ability to hold presidents, governors, and mayors et al. accountable. For instance, Nixon’s Watergate incident eventually forced President Nixon to resign (Ritchie, 1998). On January 6, 2021, the mob attacked the U.S. Congress, and Trump was suspected of inciting insurrection, so the Democratic Party launched impeachment against him (Herb, Raju, Fox, & Mattingly, 2021). But in innovative fields, such as how to govern COVID-19, Western countries have not reached a unified effective governance plan from early 2020 to early 2021. The death toll of American people has reached more than 600,000 (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021), but the Democrats have never asked President Trump to be held accountable based on laws or regulations, or

impeached him because of the unfavorable anti-pandemic. Therefore, in the aspect of COVID-19 governance, President Trump has obtained the power to be wrong without any restriction, which shows the unique characteristics of an authoritarian society. Liberal democracy has always been difficult to interpret the reason why democratically elected leaders slide to autocracy, just like a Sphinx puzzle. Error-tolerant democracy explains that liberal democracy does not recognize that the right to be wrong as an original right, right to liberty in innovative fields, can be transferred from people to elites. Then when American politicians, especially the president, obtain the power to be wrong, there is no system to effectively evaluate and supervise whether they exercise it reasonably or not, which means that liberal democracy allows them in different levels to have dictatorship in innovative fields.

Although democracy is perfectly defined as a government in which every adult citizen can choose and replace their leaders with regular, free, and fair elections, and possess fundamental civil liberties; whose system embodies the values of equality, transparency, and justice (Diamond, 1999), liberal democracy still possibly opens a secret door to autocracy: presidents, governors, and mayors et al. who unreasonably exercise the power to be wrong or abuse it can still be exempt from accountability. This is the major defect in the design of the American system of the separation of powers that only assesses whether politicians in non-innovative fields have violated the law, but lacks the evaluation of whether they have reasonably exercised the power to be wrong. Since Montesquieu (1900) put forward the separation and balance of powers systematically, this malpractice has been in existing since the beginning of the founding of the United States, and has not been corrected so far. Moreover, with the expansion of the executive power of American presidents, the power to be wrong as an original power has also expanded. Because there is no institution to effectively restrict it, the presidents are likely to escape the accountability of the system, even if they abuse it. Generally, the incumbent president and his team under re-election pressure will exercise the power to be wrong as reasonably as possible. However, without the re-election pressure, he will consider the interests of the party and leave a political legacy for the party's candidates as much as possible, so he will not abuse it excessively. Coupled with the requirements of American traditional media on presidential morality, etc., this unconstrained power to be wrong as an original power is controlled within a reasonable range. But all of the above are soft constraints.

Actually, in the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump did not fully grasp the power to be wrong of the entire United States to govern it. American state governors have great powers in the COVID-19 governance, because they are not appointed by the president, but directly elected by the people of the state and responsible for them. The federal system of the United States should have been quite advantageous in governing COVID-19, because states can conduct multiple trial-and-error plans in a short period, and then sum up the best one to guide nation's anti-pandemic activities. President Trump should have respected governors' powers and provided plenty of materials for supporting them. Error-tolerant democracy regards that Trump's correct attitude is that he can disagree with the policies enacted by Democratic governors, but he must respect their powers to be wrong.

Throughout the fight against COVID-19, Trump kept lying. So, what's the benefit for the president to lie? He has got an opportunity to deprive Democratic governors of the power to be wrong in the anti-pandemic field by publishing false information and inspiring some people to oppose various anti-pandemic policies made by Democratic governors (Katulis & Sutton, 2020; Bloomfield, 2020). Specifically, President Trump disregarded medical advice, downplayed the severity of the crisis (Brannen, Ahmed, & Newton, 2020), and attacked the

opposition Democratic governor for implementing social distancing measures, propagating unproven treatments and false health statistics, and pushing for the lifting of restrictions even if infectious diseases spread (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2020). He disdained intelligence reports warning of a worldwide outbreak in early January, regarded COVID-19 as “flu”, told American people that it would disappear “like a miracle” (Bloomfield, 2020), and recommended toxic cleaning fluids to cleanse the lungs (Downing, 2020), but actually he knew the serious consequence caused by COVID-19 (Williams, 2020). Even 220,000 Americans were dead for the deadly pandemic, but Trump continued to spread lies and false messages about COVID-19 (Norrholm, 2020). Larry Diamond (2020) supposes that a different presidential posture in the early days could have saved many American lives. The problem is that the starting point of a democratic system is to prevent bad leaders from doing bad things through institutional constraints. Why could a different president possibly save many lives? Tom Nichols (2021) has described President Trump as a mad king who can still add to the incalculable damage he has already inflicted on the nation. But the power to be wrong in governing COVID-19 was in the hands of state governors, and Trump did not have it at first. How could Trump become a mad king without the power? Therefore, the question became how President Trump could deprive Democratic governors of the power to be wrong and the corresponding right to be right?

Error-tolerant democracy notices that Democratic governors’ reasonable anti-pandemic policies, such as stay-at-home orders and social distancing measures (Behrmann, 2020), have been denied by false information, i.e., their power to be wrong is deprived by President Trump, Republicans, and some people, which means that Trump can achieve dictatorship because he has the entire power to be wrong in governing COVID-19 without any supervision. Representative democracy requires the people to respect the governor’s power to be wrong, because this power comes from the transfer of the people. In principle, once governors have issued stay-at-home orders and other decrees, the people of the state must abide by it. Even if orders issued by governors prove to be wrong in the future, the public will have abided by it before it is proven wrong. But lying or delivering false information without supervision according the above analysis can help President Trump successfully deprive Democratic governors of the power to be wrong empowered by the people, which can explain why Trump would like to lie dozens of times a day (Kessler, Kelly, & Rizzo, 2020). Therefore, this is a serious invasion of the governor’s right by President Trump and a big challenge to American democracy. A different president who would like to respect Democratic governors’ power to be wrong could have saved many lives (Diamond, 2020).

What are the consequences of infringement? After Democratic Party’s reasonable trial-and-error practice, such as a stay-at-home order, was denied, the United States has missed the golden period of containing COVID-19, the first three months of 2020 to save lives. In addition, Trump has also politicized the wearing of masks. This is a serious error that has not been corrected until Biden became President in 2021 (CDC, 2021), but it was too late to curb the disease. After Trump used false information to deprive Democratic governors of the power to trial and error, and ultimately dominated the entire US anti-pandemic trend, the separation of powers has failed to assess whether President Trump reasonably exercised it (Acemoglu, 2020). In the end, American liberal democracy seriously lacks the ability to correct errors during Trump’s administration, and the cost is more than 600,000 American lives.

To sum up, error-tolerant democracy believes that: Firstly, how can the power to be wrong of American governors be protected, and which agency can evaluate whether they reasonably exercise it? Without this mechanism, all American politicians can be exempt from responsibility in the face of major crises; secondly,

the right to access authentic information is one of the most important pillars of democracy (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2020), which helps state governors exercise the power to be wrong reasonably, and defend their rational trial-and-error activities in order to let individuals understand the behavior of the state government. But Trump kept issuing false information, and Democratic governors' reasonable exercise of the power to be wrong was questioned and finally abandoned by the people through protesting; thirdly, President Trump has stolen the power to practice trial-and-error activities to fight the pandemic, which originally belongs to Democratic state governors, showing the president's invasion of them. Therefore, American core value of liberal democracy has been shaken.

If the separation of powers is designed to specifically assess whether presidents, state governors, and mayors have reasonably exercised the power to be wrong as an original power during the crisis, then the institution can issue a warning to the president as soon as possible. If he still refuses to exercise it reasonably after being warned, and the results have shown that the president's behavior is regarded as an abuse of the power to trial and error, then his power in this area, such as the COVID-19 field, will be banned. Another evidence of Trump's abuse of his power to be wrong is public opinion polls. Poll has shown that the vast majority of Americans want their leaders to follow experts' advice. Yet that did not happen. The only rational voice in the government from Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases continued to contradict Trump on every point (Winters, 2020).

Epidemiologists have found that the United States was too slow to implement social distancing guidelines, so that 90% of coronavirus deaths in the United States were caused by delayed implementation (Litt, 2020). After President Biden came to power, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy will form a task force to investigate possible interference in scientific research under the Trump administration (Budryk, 2021), which is very important, because Trump issued false information to deprive Democratic governors of the power to be wrong. Error-tolerant democracy agrees with Hatcher's opinion that Trump has violated principles during COVID-19, such as practicing transparency and respecting medical experts (Hatcher, 2020), and Thompson's point of view that leadership based on democratic values, such as truthfulness, justice, and temperance, can save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans (Thompson, 2020). But for error-tolerant democracy, President Trump has fully grasped the illegal power to be wrong without being supervised and has been seeking benefits for himself by violating democratic principles mentioned above, which undoubtedly undermined American democracy. Therefore, the failure of COVID-19 governance is not the failure of liberal democracy itself, but it represents the transformation of the United States from democracy to autocracy (Acemoglu, 2020).

Finally, error-tolerant democracy requires that leaders perform the obligations of sharing errors or self-criticism with the people in the public fields. The president of the United States is the person who best knows the defects of American political system. As far as the current American politics is concerned, once the president takes the initiative to carry out self-criticism in public to the people, which means that he and his party would like to provide evidences for the opposition to attack them, which is undoubtedly considered as a suicide. Therefore, in the current situation, it is difficult for American people to look forward to the moral progress of American leaders. In traditional Chinese culture, self-criticism or repent in public is a kind of noble moral character and anyone who practice it will be regarded as a saint (Zhou, 2019). However, under the leadership of liberal democracy, the United States does not need the president to be a man with noble morality.

When President Trump caused more than 600,000 deaths (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021) due to his personal governance errors, not only did he not publicly admit his errors and take responsibility or resign, but even dreamed of continuing to govern. Why does this cruel reality appear in America with the value of liberal democracy? The explanation of error-tolerant democracy from the perspective of morality is that after the separation of state and religion, the spirit of public self-criticism or repentance to the people has been far away from liberal democracy. Therefore, it is difficult for American politicians to make profound self-confession, which is not considered as an obligation in liberal democracy, and which also indicates that liberal democracy needs to be rebuilt urgently.

Conclusion

At the end of May 2021, the United States officially announced that the death toll from COVID-19 in the United States has exceeded 600,000 (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). Why is liberal democracy as a universal value—regarded by Fukuyama as the ultimate value of mankind (Fukuyama, 1992)—difficult to effectively curb COVID-19 in the United States? From the beginning of 2020 to the first half of 2021, the ability of liberal democracy to correct errors has not been truly proved, so that about two-thirds of American adults are quite disappointed with democratic politics (Wike, Silver, Schumacher, & Connaughton, 2021). What is the root cause of the failure to govern COVID-19 in the United States? Error-tolerantism believes that there exists one fatal defect in the understanding of liberty in liberal democracy. Error-tolerant democracy constructed on the philosophical basis of error-tolerantism divides political democracy into two parts: The first part is electoral democracy; the second one is governance democracy in which the president exercises the power to be wrong reasonably and the corresponding power to be right correctly. Without electoral democracy, governance democracy cannot be effectively guaranteed. Liberal democracy emphasizes electoral democracy, and also pays attention to governance democracy in non-innovative fields, requiring the president to exercise the power to be right correctly. The accountability or impeachment mechanism in non-innovative fields is quite mature, but it fails to realize that the president in innovative field has the power to be wrong without any supervision.

Once the president unreasonably exercises or abuses the power to be wrong as an original power, then a series of sub-rights such as people's right to life, freedom, and property etc. will be completely harmed, which liberal democracy fails to recognize. In innovative fields, the elected president may abuse the power to be wrong like a dictator. But liberal democracy allows Trump to abuse it, because the separation and balance of powers in innovative fields fails to supervise this abuse, that is, there is a serious loophole in the American democratic system that allows the US president to exercise dictatorship in the field of innovation, which eventually causes great damage to people's rights to life, freedom, property, and other sub-rights. Therefore, the system design of the separation and balance of powers cannot require Trump to be held responsible for the disadvantages of the fight against the pandemic. In other words, hundreds of thousands of Americans died of Trump's dictatorship, but this is not his fault alone, because this kind of error is allowed by liberal democracy. Error-tolerant democracy emphasizes that the design of American political system should add new functions: The system of separation of powers should supervise whether the president reasonably exercises the power to trial and error, and even suspend or deprive it if necessary. If the United States had such a system design, it would be possible for it to suspend President Trump's power in the COVID-19 governance in early 2020, or he would release real information and take the initiative to fight the disease because of the pressure of this system

design. Then, hundreds of thousands of people could be saved across the United States. If the country wishes to avoid similar tragedies in the future, it must carry out some innovations on the basis of the separation and balance of powers system, or it is still unable to cope with the future major pandemic attack.

More specifically, error-tolerant democracy suggests that the Congress of the United States of America enact the “Ordinance of Trial and Error”, which authorizes government officials including President the power to be wrong or power to trial and error. Meanwhile, courts must assess whether president, governor, mayor, et al. reasonably exercise it. The “Ordinance of Trial and Error” is like installing a brake system in the co-pilot position. How to govern COVID-19 in early 2020 is unknown, and the people have to authorize officials especially their president the power to trial and error, but the people must assess whether the officials reasonably exercise it. If there are sufficient evidences that it has been abused, the co-pilot’s braking system will be activated to warn or even deprive them of the power to trial and error. For instance, if the Supreme Court or corresponding mechanism believes that President Trump had abused the power to be wrong and the corresponding power to be right in COVID-19 governance, then his power in this field should have been suspended. Waiting until the end of president’s term just like Sartori’s competitive-feedback democracy (1987), the United States has sacrificed too many lives.

The reasons for the failure of the COVID-19 governance in the United States are the defects of traditional liberal democracy and Trump’s destruction of democracy. The first defect is the lack of supervision and evaluation of politician power to trial and error; the second is Trump’s destruction of liberal democracy. By issuing false information, he has denied the fact that Democratic governors have the power to trial and error, which eventually led to COVID-19’s flooding in the United States. So authentic information is the cornerstone of democratic politics, because it is a prerequisite for presidents, governors, mayors, et al., to reasonably exercise the power to trial and error.

Fukuyama (2014) states that liberal democracy still does not have any real competitors in the realm of ideas. But error-tolerant democracy has shown that liberal democracy needs to overcome the above defects. For error-tolerant democracy, Amartya’s conclusion that liberty and democracy help fight disasters is undoubtedly correct, but the understanding of liberty and democracy is completely different from liberalism and liberal democracy (Narita & Sudo, 2021; Flinders, 2021; Lo & Shi, 2020). Error-tolerantism and error-tolerant democracy have stronger error correction ability and explanatory power than liberalism and liberal democracy, as can protect people’s lives and let democracy survive (Milligan, 2020). Moreover, only by supervising the power to be wrong in innovative fields can we truly prevent the slippage of liberal democracy to autocracy.

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