

## The Not-So-Silent Rise of Nationalism: A COVID-19 Result

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### Abstract

Since the discovery and surge of the COVID-19 virus in the early days of 2020, we saw the creepy crawl of accusations and counteraccusations, the divisions between the scientific communities, the lack of exemplary conduct by the political elites, the lack of transparency in the reporting of death statistics, and the increasing lack of confidence and support for people. Amidst all this was a burgeoning of defensive and, on many occasions, offensive nationalism. A stage that mirrored resounding the amended final command from the 1924 George Orwell's *Animal farms*, wherein the Pigs, the more intelligent of the manor farm animals, proclaim that some animals are more equal than others.

**Keywords:** Nationalism; COVID-19; Brexit; Vaccine Wars; Regional Cooperation

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## Introduction

Originally written in 1983 and republished again in 2006, Benedict Anderson's academic work on nationalism, entitled 'Imagined Communities,' suggests that nationalism traditionally has meant revolt, unrest, and a longing. One example is the gaining of independence in India from the UK and the freeing of some African countries from colonial masters from Europe (Anderson, 1983; 2006). This is a traditional and sacrosanct definition of nationalism inviolable (Pulla, 2020). Interestingly, the conceptualisation involves the expression of interest in one's country. The evocative feelings about the land, the territory, the flag, and its colours (Pulla, 2020). Further, it outlines yield language, skin colour, the racial features of its people's economy, land, the size and vastness of its military prowess, air and water borders, and natural resources (Anderson, 1983; 2006). Clearly, nationalism is multi-layered and multi-dimensional—the dynamics are rooted in the ideological bases and sentiments of people to get organised as movements or rally around a cause (Das et al., 2022). Just like the Ugandans and the Congolese who trade at the Kasindi border amicably (Pulla, 2014), coexisting nationalisms have allowed people within the European Union (EU) to move into each other's nations until recently without being stopped at the border of alien control.

This article begins with an exploration of nationalism within the COVID-19 context, with arising wars vying for medical supplies and vaccinations. It then discusses the racism thrust upon Asians, spearheaded by former US President Trump and then later reinforced by government leaders from countries such as Australia in their requests for investigations in China. Impacts on international trade and resource management are explored, with many countries hoarding medical supplies and resources for themselves instead of sharing with their neighbours and contributing to the global effort led by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Following this, nationalism is discussed within the context of Congo pre-COVID-19 times

and the many styles of modern nationalism that we have seen. It follows with the narrative of country leaders influencing the view of COVID-19 risks, claiming to be the ones to 'fix' the problem and offering citizens liberties instead of strict mandates, to their detriment.

## Explaining Nationalism

When stated as a political theory, nationalism maintains that sovereign societies known as countries are required for the flourishing of human prosperity. Therefore, in deciding their own affairs, nations should be granted a degree of freedom (Woods et al., 2020). In world affairs, this principle provides the basis for self-determination. Societies that legitimately claim to be a 'country' should ideally have a right to self-determination. But nationalism is more than a political ideology; it is also a source of essential sense and identity. Its additional features include features such as the national anthem, national songs, dress, notifying endangered animal species, birds, biodiversity, and the rest (Pulla, 2020).

Authors suggest that exceptionalism and nationalism can lead to an attitude of invulnerability, sluggish and poor reactions to attacks, and individual safety violations. The first responses of the UK and US to the covid-19 global pandemic show the influence of nationalist rhetoric in political decision-making (Bortlotti and Murphy-Hollies, 2022).

Basically, nationalism offers a basis for unity and division. It is inspiring as a powerful idiom and provides its people with such intensity of feeling that they can lay down their lives for the land or defend their fellow compatriots and clearly have the ability to arouse and cultivate deep-seated hatred, xenophobia and hostility and generate violence towards those considered aliens (Woods et al., 2020).

Sadly, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the silent war over its medical supplies and vaccine distribution seem to be the new nationalism—almost a war of words, to begin with, twirled with, for instance, propaganda between the US and China. The starters are always more likeable

than the main meal; it seems ironically with the relationships between the US and China, that the 'Chinese leadership could cash on coronavirus, so to speak, to test the United States for a single war. Can you match us in containing a pandemic, as President Xi practically offered? The United States could not avoid this threat any more than it could ignore Sputnik in 1957' (Woods et al., 2020, p.811). Thus, the competition for public health began as to who would convert stadiums and public car parks into hospitals literally overnight constructing their own personal protective equipment (PPE) that would outnumber additional administration tests? For the rest of the countries, this nationalism meant seeking more involvement in the partnership of people in the arena, enlisting NGOs, opposition parties and all political elites. The US is one of the countries that dumped many bodies into mass graves. I do not think anyone wishes to follow the UK. That would be a disaster.

Shocked as they were, many did not sound interested in who was presiding the race into death or freedom from COVID-19.

In Europe, however, several nations followed a sequence of declarations of intent. A truck loaded with medical supplies was stopped at the German-Swiss border during the early months of COVID-19, after German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed to suspend most defensive medical equipment exports. A diplomatic spat ensued between Austria and Switzerland, Germany, and its neighbours (Vogel, 2020). It is alleged that in a rush for protection from COVID-19, the US hijacked mask shipments meant for France from the tarmac. Turkish-made masks for those European nations have never arrived (Willsher et al., 2020). Also accused of stashing supplies was China. Czech authorities engaged in State-backed theft of masks intended for Rome (Pulla, 2020). Extensive display of 'Euro-scepticism' in France, Italy, the Netherlands and so on, and Brexit, provided more evidence of populism's reactionary, right-wing, or even extreme right-wing political agenda, indicating a false consciousness with the less literate follow-up in many of those EU countries (Woods et al., 2020).

The author of this paper contends that refugees and temporary residents in a number of nations have been subjected to harsh treatment. Within the first two months of the epidemic, economies all over the world shrank, reporting negative growth; unemployment rose; and lives were widely affected. Politicians viewed this as the consequence of a war on domestic territory, and the public considered it to be an endeavour in a war. Rapidly, the leaders of numerous nations began their assault on the Chinese origins of the virus and the ways in which their public utterances have influenced the rise of nationalism in their own countries.

Around the same time, they ordered over 158 million Americans not to move out of their homes. The US also has a few million people who valued their freedoms more than others. These individuals wore a preventive masks as part of a plot and remained mute when they see the mass graves dug for the dead. I read a columnist writing in the Philadelphia Inquirer that America was drunk on a warped concept of democracy (Pulla, 2020). Their political loyalties were challenged, and the WHO director, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, was seen as a China agent as he received the Chinese vote for his nomination to the position of Director of WHO—a coveted role. Former president Trump even agreed to withhold WHO support from the United States.

We had a wealth of prime ministers and presidents. They were caught in cat-napping postures and virtual denial. Some leaders seemed to appear busy sorting out their own domestic feuds. Through public health initiatives of lockdowns, secure distancing, and initial management of toilet paper shortages and lack of hand sanitiser, governments started pandemic management by encouraging almost every entrepreneur to manufacture them. Healthcare management costs have driven the unintended impacts of lockdowns and border closures. As a result of the virus reported from Wuhan, Asians began facing racism (Mead, 2020). Soon the racial slur spread further to Iranians and Italians. Germany and Switzerland and Austria did their spitting throughout Europe.

Economic parameters quickly took the racial elements, so much so it is difficult to imagine the future of racial identity in a post--COVID world.

We have been experiencing the rise of nationalism in Asia and many nations in Europe for a long time (Pulla, 2020). To make matters worse, however, the Wuhan virus seems to have brewed too easily (Mead, 2020), and the former US president Donald Trump started referring to the COVID-19 coronavirus as the “Chinese virus” in the second half of March 2020. I'm sure he was deliberately doing that. After this, a prodigious multimedia war ensued between the two nations and friendly countries and an ally like Australia also began to respond.

Foreign Minister Marise Payne of Australia indicated that the country would press for the outbreak of COVID-19 to be an independent international investigation. She was addressing the ‘Insiders’ of the Australian Broadcasting Companies (ABC) (Dziedzic, 2020). A few days later, Prime Minister Scott Morrison went a step further, suggesting that it is important to investigate as to what triggered the outbreak and that the World Health Organization (WHO) would need tough new “weapons inspector” powers. This did not go well, boy oh boy, as it was inevitably perceived as political dynamite (Dziedzic, 2020).

The Chinese Government was indeed infuriated, inspiring Australia to launch a political attack on Australia being a lackey to the United States. The Chinese ambassador threatened a consumer boycott of the Australian exports of beef and a lock-in tariffs on barley.

An extraordinary duel of words has exploded between Australia and China after Australia instigated a call for an international investigation into the causes of the COVID-19 outbreak. Several world leaders backed that. The verbal escalations have been extraordinary. Mr. Scott Morrison remained a shade more polite but nevertheless believed that the coronavirus emanated in Wuhan, “likely in its wildlife wet markets” (ABC News, 2020). Not to be outdone, the editor of the state-run Global Times, Hu Xijin, described Australia as “chewing gum stuck on the sole of China’s shoes.” “Sometimes you have

to find a stone to rub it off,” Hu posted on Weibo (ABC News 2020). These cacophonies lead to question—is nationalism bad? And if so, how bad?

Turkey took a step further. Instead of working on COVID within the country with volunteers and non-governmental organisations and dealing with causalities, its leadership decided to project a great foreign policy to help other countries. It chose about 80 countries with predominant Muslim populations worldwide — from Sudan to Somalia. Clearly, this piece of humanitarianism is easily perceivable as a pro-Islamic move (Öztürk, 2020).

Highly resourceful and rich regional cooperation instruments such as the EU have shown a shameful lack of camaraderie during COVID-19 with the citizens of Italy. During the pandemic, Brexit, almost a one-sided anthem at the beginning that was launched long before COVID-19, gained more currency and a common nationalist reaction in the UK. While the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Boris Johnson, joined the rank of world leaders who continued the foolhardy handling of COVID-19, he is unlikely to be admonished to rise and become vociferous about Brexit. Nationalism reigns once more. Former president Trump decided not to pay any more national dues to WHO. He continued his insinuations and promised that the virus would be wiped out of the USA by Easter of 2020, and it would be business as usual. There is a modern nationalism that has raised the bar, but the virus continues to be supreme and reigns.

India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, called the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) States’ conference to jointly lead the crucial response to COVID-19. The step by Mr. Modi was described as a thoughtful drive to react to China’s rising presence in the region by reaffirming the leadership of India (Karki, 2020). India pledged \$10 million to the SAARC emergency fund and supported the SAARC states with a team of specialists. Despite their domestic misery, Turkey and India continued to venture out and

pursue foreign policies that demonstrated their Nationalism and humanitarian response.

### **Nationalism in Pre-COVID Times**

I have written about Bwera, a Ugandan settlement on the Rubirihya River (Pulla, 2013). East of Beni, the river separates DRC and Uganda. Ugandans and Congolese sell their goods on the riverbanks. As stallholders, they negotiate pricing in Kinande, their native language.

Ugandans use shillings, and Congolese use francs. Both sides of the border have the same merchants. People load trucks with bananas and palm oil from the Congo, cross the border, and unload in Uganda, but they exhibit Ugandan ID papers. Ugandan drivers entering Congo via Kasindi have the same restrictions (Pulla, 2013). Customs officers check malt, grey cement, corn starch, and other goods. Ugandans use Congolese ID to get tax breaks. Border Post personnel can't identify Ugandan from Congolese cars at checkpoints. For border protection police, nationalistic discomfiture doesn't matter who is Congolese (Pulla, 2013).

### **Pandemic Populism**

In the pre-COVID period, protagonists at crucial historical junctures used crises well to fuel Nationalism. Today's political leadership used COVID-19 as an opportunity to galvanise people and build on the demonstration of solidarity and comrades of myriad colours and also seem to infuse fear into society. Media releases from states, the WHO, pharmaceutical firms, medical councils, and social think tanks, on the one hand, and alternative media, social media, conventional critics, and just average people all have equal resources for their cause and effect to spearhead and crusade. I always maintained that fear is an industry; there is so much that goes with it in merchandising. There appears to be very little about human well-being, but it all seems to be about building an environment of regulation and containment during this pandemic. People have a right to inquire during their anxiety: is there a plan to control the world? In Spain and Germany, there are groups of medical professionals who seem to share an

opinion that COVID-19 is a planned pandemic, suggests Susann R  thrich, a member of parliament with the centre-left Social Democrats, in Germany, that it is essential to take the current uncertainty (Pfeifer, 2020) seriously. She called for publicly debated and open decisions, especially in the second phase of the pandemic, suggesting that we must not stifle any new debates that emerge (Pfeifer, 2020). It is obvious to her and many others that the longer individuals have to give up their well-established everyday lives, the longer uncertainty prevails. And even supporters of touch bans and stay-at-home orders became more open to populist or conspiratorial content, and politicians should respond to this media-generated phenomenal opinion. In his keynote address to Georgetown University, Dr Anthony Fauci shouted with a strange certainty that a sudden outbreak of the infectious disease would certainly occur during President Trump's first term (Fauci, 2017).

Bill Gates revealed that a global pandemic was on its way the following year (2018), which would easily wipe out 30 million people (Loria, 2018a). Melinda (Mrs Gates) did not lag. She added that an engineered virus is the biggest threat to humankind and guaranteed that in the coming years, this will impact humanity (Loria, 2018b). But it is different today; some seem to see nationalism as an evil rising, and some think it is necessary. What happened when the COVID-19 Virus and Border Pass came along? Countries have bolted their doors inside so that society is well preserved and redefined that used to go beyond the boundaries. This new nationalism has pervaded continents and allowed thousands of people to die and led them to be buried in mass graves. Florian Bieber (2018) suggests that nationalism is both omnipresent and elusive, "like air." It permeates the world system, governments, and people's actions, and can be seen as both conservative and progressive, threatening the status quo (p. 519).

### **How Many Sides to Nationalism?**

Brexit (UK) and Mr Narendra Modi in India are examples of the emergence of nationalistic ethos in the midst of patriotic fervour for change in these countries. While some of the slogans in

the recent past may be referred to as part of modern nationalism, new ways of achieving self-sufficiencies within nations have also been sought. For example, the US slogan 'America First' used by President Trump or Indian Prime Minister Modi's idiom 'Make in India' are examples of driving nationalism through growth (Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2019). Critics would claim that the notion of nationalism aimed at working for robust economic growth could be symbolic but intrinsic (Das et al., 2022).

In the United States, in 2016, when Mr. Donald Trump secured the presidency for the first time, American nationalism seemed to have touched on a new flavour. Trump seemed to have outraged both the Republican and Democratic Party institutions in a way. There were millions of American working-class and middle-class families who seemed to have left for Trump and were worried about income inequalities. A modern nationalism? Former President Trump also criticised the large pharmaceutical firms and seemed to have made drug costs inexpensive and sustainable. The Trump regime also brought the lowest incarceration rate in 31 years for Black Americans. He pledged, among other items, to large military budgets (Bedard, 2020) and vowed that he would bring most of his troops back from Afghanistan.

To many nonchalant world political leaders who harangue right around the globe, the emergence of COVID-19 was not unknown in the first place. They preferred to underplay, however, and the leaders bluffed away in several influential countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, among others. Prime ministers and presidents were overconfident, frivolous, and blatantly dismissive of the potential of the pandemic to topple governments and the economy and demonstrate their blissful ignorance (Pulla, 2020). In fact, former President Trump said this at a time when 158 million Americans were told to stay at home. Many critics of US President Joe Biden do not regard the election process in 2020 as being fair and transparent, but as a result of new normal nationalism that seemed to have included ridiculing social distance, not wearing masks, and preferring independence, no one can

override political casualties. Except that it came with death for many to choose liberty.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Susan Blackmore says most near-death research concentrates on NDEs, light jets, and out-of-body experiences and rarely brings out a person's life review. Survivors report major changes in temperament, preferences, and intentions (Blackmore, 2020). COVID 19 touched many international leaders. Boris Johnson was one such leader that brushed death earlier and the Doctors were almost preparing a script of announcement in case he was to become a casualty of Covid-19 (The Guardian, 2020). Yet these leaders lacked insight, their responses lacked depth, intuition, and empathy and such leaders were expecting people to give up their freedom and dwell indoors. Thousands of deaths during the worldwide crisis pushed for prudent policies. Will death-nearness change anyone? (The Guardian, 2020).

It is impossible to deny that the impacts of the pandemic are having an effect on the psyche of humanity and are modifying the practise of nationalism as well as its meaning. The most recent studies have shown that when a crisis strikes, people from all different countries do not, on general, adopt a more nationalistic mindset (Su & Shen 2020). If an individual's ideological conviction is consistent with their national identity, then they will become more nationalistic. On the other hand, if an individual's ideological believe is inconsistent with their national identity, then they are more likely to withdraw their support for the nation-state (Su & Shen, 2020). Obviously, the causal link between COVID-19 and nationalism was a good fit for the hypothetical constructions that were presented in the research on crisis-nationalism. Su and Shen (2020) contend that the uncertainty and confusion brought on by a crisis discourages people from picking up the phone and making a call. During the pandemic, there is a large amount of evidence that can be observed, and the future is likely to be fraught with additional worries over the production, distribution, and administration of the purported vaccine. We saw that the vaccination was not universal, just like

other vaccinations, and we have experienced a vulture strategy, in which some vetoing nations decided who gets it first and how that nation will determine whose lives are important?

Although it is obvious that such populist nationalism will fulfil the requirements of nationalist beliefs. There is no question that the ongoing pandemic problem is contributing to the dominance of the state. My greatest concern is that, in the context of the present, we might observe equal application of the Darwinian hypothesis. There are millions of COVID victims, both elderly and young, who appear to place their life in the hands of the state as their primary authority figure.

This current surrender on the part of many people all around the world and all over the nations is illustrative of the bloody quick increase in nationalism that has been occurring recently. As academics, we can debate the distinctions between nationhood and statehood until the cows come home, but the truth is out there for everyone to hear and see. Fearmongers and pharmaceutical companies will continue to plough through the opportunity given the current climate of incited nationalist feeling. Their commercial strategies and practises have the potential to plunge the states into anarchy and additional conflict. It was a very difficult Christmas in 2020 and 2021 for many people who had to see loved ones who were confined to nursing facilities since it was in their best interests to do so. The pandemic will almost probably succeed in bringing about increased nation-to-nation cooperation and inciting contentious debate on the appropriate vaccination dosages. Alongside the human being the primary casualty ethics will remain the primary victim and will continue to be slaughtered at the altar. It is unlikely that the climate will ever return to its previous state because ethics appear to have been freely abandoned. There is no resolution possible because it is a pandemic.

Nationalism has not only been used as an excuse by political leaders to justify their rants, excessive reliance on scientific bureaucracies, and their ineffective social control mechanisms

for the containment of covid-19, but it has also influenced the way in which individual citizens began to rebel in their rule-flouting behaviour when refusing to conform to any safety and hygienic recommendations and guidelines. Excessive Nationalism or exceptionalism has not only been used by political leaders as a pretext to legitimise their policing, which has resulted in the usurpation of a huge amount of power through covid-19-an alibi for them. Ethnocentric nationals in the EU, after all, following the UK and the US, frequently alluded to the same ideas of supremacy and freedom that their political leaders had espoused while they danced on the roads rather than staying at home as a precautionary measure.

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There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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