

Governance Implications of a Human Influenza Pandemic¹

The extent to which a pandemic will impact on governance systems will depend on the severity of the pandemic and the strength of a country's governance system, in the sense of the level of trust it enjoys, its disaster and risk management capabilities, and its ability to adapt to the unique challenges posed by a pandemic.

Chain of command

- Absenteeism (due to mortality, morbidity and other factors) will impact on all management and chain-of-command structures and is therefore likely to have diverse knock-on effects in terms of public order and ability to respond to the many challenges posed by a pandemic (including those beyond public health concerns).

Manipulation of the crisis

- In a severe pandemic – as in all situations of dramatic upheaval – it is possible that ruthless and predatory elements will attempt to exploit events for monetary or political gain.
- Certain groups (such as minorities, undocumented migrants, refugees) may become scapegoats.

Challenges to existing governance systems

- In countries where health care and other essential services perform poorly, existing power holders may be challenged.
- In countries with weak governance systems, a severe pandemic could lead to a significant breakdown of routine governance processes or even of the overall governance structure.

Role of security and law and order forces

- Some countries may declare a state of emergency, and entrust the running of essential services to civil defence mechanisms, the military and/or the police. This could have major human rights and humanitarian implications for disenfranchised or marginalized groups.

Potential human rights implications

- A pandemic may result in restrictions on movement and forced quarantining.
- During a pandemic discriminatory attitudes and practices may arise, with implications for access by certain individuals and groups to reliable information, health care and other essential services.
- If a state of emergency is declared, there may be derogation of some rights.

Key policy issues

- In a context of scarce resources, governments will be forced to **prioritize**: what criteria will be used, who will decide, how transparent and equitable will that process be?

¹ No specific literature has been located on this topic. These insights are gleaned from a cross-section of AHI-specific articles and commentary.

- A pandemic could result in a high level of public, political and media concern. Responding to people's concerns and expectations through effective **risk communication** is crucial both in the current pre-pandemic/alert period and during an actual pandemic.
- The level of **public trust** in the government will be a critical factor in the extent to which societies effectively address the challenges posed by a pandemic.
- The level of **transparency** and of **public accountability** of the government will also play an important role.
- The extent to which governance systems demonstrate **flexibility** in adapting to a rapidly evolving threat and radically changed circumstances, will have significant implications in terms of the overall impact of a pandemic, as well as for governance in the immediate post-pandemic period.

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