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The governance shock doctrine: Civic space in the pandemic

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Summary

Motivation: Emergencies heighten societies' need to be governed. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic put systems of public governance under severe pressure across the globe. Civic freedoms were widely curtailed for public health reasons. Scarce resources needed to be allocated swiftly, with little opportunity for debate.

Purpose: In settings characterized by authoritarianism, violent conflict, and restricted civic space, relations between governments, civil society, and citizens at best tend to be fragile and fraught even in "normal" times. What happens when these settings are rocked by a profound shock such as the onset of a global pandemic?

Methods and approach: This article is based on research on civic space and civic action shortly after the onset of the pandemic in three such settings—Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Civil society advocates in each country tracked and interpreted events in real time, debated their responses, supplemented their own knowledge through key informant interviews, and compared experiences across countries.

Findings: I argue that the three governments' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic constitute a "governance shock doctrine," based on the premise that shocks bring responses from the powerful that advance certain agendas. This patterned phenomenon, visible across the three countries, consists of "securitization" of the public health emergency,

suppression of dissent, extension and centralization of executive powers, curtailment of press freedoms, and tightened regulation of civic space, including online space. Civic activism navigated or combated these attacks in various ways.

Policy implications: Measures adopted in emergency situations tend to persist, threatening to lock civil society into living with pandemic-era restrictions. Preventing this should be a global priority, and especially important where authoritarianism already looms. An energetic mobilization among national and international actors to reassert and protect civic space is needed if the erosion of civil liberties and normalization of autocratic governance wrought by the political-military apparatus in so many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic is not to become permanent, and if the inspired and progressive innovations in organic civic activism over the 2020–2021 crisis period are to survive and flourish.

KEYWORDS
civic activism, civic space, COVID-19, governance, shock doctrine

1 | INTRODUCTION

In settings characterized by authoritarianism, violent conflict, and restricted civic space, relations between governments, civil society, and citizens at best tend to be fragile and fraught. What happens when these settings are rocked by a profound shock such as the onset of a global pandemic? This article examines what happened to civic space in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan during the period of crisis occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and how this has reconfigured the spaces available for social and political activism.[1] As such, it is a contribution to understandings of what is happening to civic space in the early 21st century, and of the scope afforded for accountable, democratic governance in these difficult settings, which appear to be ever more common and set to continue growing in number.

Whatever the context, a national or global emergency heightens society's need to be governed. Protecting and restoring public health in a pandemic requires complex and restrictive regulation. Crisis puts to the test state and government systems for governing the collective and distributing public goods. The trends in civic space in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan since the early 2000s are fairly typical of countries around the world. But, as argued by Gaventa (2023) and Joshi (2023), these are complex, difficult settings, characterized by histories of authoritarianism and military rule, conflict and violence, and weak democratic institutions. When they come under strain, as in a global pandemic, authorities might be expected to resort to historical authoritarian tendencies and move to consolidate their power. Just when civil society organizations (CSOs) are needed to support marginalized groups in fulfilling their material needs and making claims on the state, they might find they have less room to do so. When already fragile governance relationships are thrown into disarray, the social contract between authorities and citizens may

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be subject to renegotiation, with possible implications for the long-term future of governance relationships. These are the issues we explored between June and December 2020 as COVID-19 spread through the three case-study countries.

In 2007 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina that devastated the US city of New Orleans, Naomi Klein popularized the notion of the "economic shock doctrine," arguing that after "natural disasters" or political crises there follows, unerringly, the imposition of corporativist "economic shock doctrine" by the forces of neoliberalism. In a phenomenon she calls "disaster capitalism," while the crisis victims are still in shock, political and economic elites seize the opportunity to push through policies that deepen economic inequality (Solis, 2020), implanting capitalist market-based logics and practices into the post-disaster landscape for the long term (Klein, 2007). The notion has been both heralded as visionary (Tabb, 2008) and critiqued as simplistic (Bark, 2009) and biased (Stiglitz, 2007). But Klein offers persuasive evidence for the cases that she explores that changes of a particular ideological bent were wrought in the immediate post-crisis phase by corporate and government actors operating in opportunistic ways under cover of the crisis. Interviewed days after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, Klein described the pandemic as a shock and early US government reactions as disaster capitalism (Solis, 2020).

Our study adopted an inductive, grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) to examine the impact of the pandemic on closing civic space. Our evidence from Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan shows a patterned phenomenon, recognizable across countries, of "securitization" of the public health emergency, suppression of dissent, extension and centralization of executive powers, curtailment of press freedoms, and rapidly tightened regulation of civic space, including online space. Influenced by Klein, I argue that embedded in the respective governments' multi-faceted responses to the COVID-19 pandemic was a "governance shock doctrine" that has profound proximate effects on civic activism and social actors in the short term as well as structural effects on governance relations in the long term.

In the next section I review recent relevant contributions to debates on civic space. Section 3 describes the unique methodology of the Navigating Civic Space in a Time of Covid study, and Section 4 briefly outlines the pre-pandemic context of civic space in the three countries, the onset of COVID-19, and government responses to it. Section 5 focuses on how civic space was reshaped under the pandemic in these settings, with briefer reference to how civic activism responded. Section 6 elaborates on the pandemic governance shock doctrine proposition. I conclude by reflecting on longer-term implications in terms of the continuing risks to civic space and civic activism and how these could be mitigated.

2 | CIVIC SPACE, RECENT PAST, AND PRESENT

Theories about the role civil society plays in making democracy work and realizing people's economic, social, civil, political, environmental, and other rights, are predicated on the assumption that civil society has the necessary space and protections to play these roles (Buyse, 2018; Wolff & Poppe, 2015). That is, it assumes the availability of civic space: an environment—physical and virtual—where people and associations can actively organize, speak out, protest, dissent, and help each other without fear of official disapproval or harassment, and without breaking the law.[2] Earlier work has made the case that a vibrant civil society and an open civic space are particularly important to vulnerable and marginalized segments of societies for satisfying their needs, realizing their rights, and keeping inequalities in check (Hossain, Khurana, Mohmand et al., 2018; Hossain, Khurana, Nazneen et al., 2019; Mercer, 2002; OHCHR, 2017; Stewart, 2000).

Yet, despite the relatively longstanding consensus about the importance of civic space for democracy and development, it has been getting more regulated and controlled for some time (Buyse, 2018; Gaventa & McGee, 2010;

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[2]This definition of civic space draws on Cocom and Savage (2021) and Hossain and Khurana (2019).

Hossain et al., 2019; van der Borgh & Terwindt, 2012).[3] When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out these trends continued and, in many commentators' views, deepened and accelerated. Academic research and global commentary from April 2020 noted how emergency legislation was curbing human rights and reducing space for civil society to operate in countries ranging from eastern Europe to south-east Asia (Mullard & Aarvik, 2020). By June 2020 it was clear that established European democracies were intensifying pre-pandemic restrictions on civic space (Narsee, 2020). A global review on COVID-19 and civic space published in July 2020 covering academic sources and publications by international organizations, CSOs, and think tanks, cites no fewer than 34 references documenting restrictions in the forms of emergency laws; censorship, access to information and discourse; and digital surveillance (Barendsen et al., 2020).

The key global civil society monitoring platforms and studies consolidate the picture. By 2021, CIVICUS reported that 96.9% of the world's population lived in countries with "closed," "repressed," or "obstructed" civic space and just 3.1% in countries with "open" civic space (CIVICUS, 2021). The 2021 V-Dem Democracy Report, *Autocratization turns viral*, documented the same trends, pointing out that 68% of the world's population lived in autocracies, principally "electoral autocracies" where multiparty elections take place but in the absence of democratic institutions and standards (Alizada et al., 2021). In 2022 Freedom House declared 16 years of democratic decline and warned that with "the enemies of liberal democracy […] accelerating their attacks […] the global order is nearing a tipping point" (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022, p. 1).

It should be noted that some studies have documented a simultaneous surge in "people power" and pro-democracy mobilization, with 2019 described as "the year of protest" (Garguilo, 2019), and some renovation and radicalization observed in modes of civic activism (Brannen et al., 2020; Chenoweth, 2020; Maerz et al., 2020; Youngs, 2019). But this counter-trend has occurred in spite of, or perhaps partly in reaction to, the well-catalogued, systematic, and global deterioration of civic space.

3 | METHODOLOGY

When the pandemic broke out in early 2020, A4EA partners the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR, Pakistan), the Institute of Economic and Social Affairs (IESE, Mozambique), and Spaces for Change (S4C, Nigeria) initiated a research project to explore how COVID-19 and the challenges of a pandemic interacted with ongoing trends towards shrinking civic space in these three settings and what the long-term implications might be. Over June–December 2020 we applied an innovative observatory methodology based on collective and comparative analysis of dynamics as they unfolded. This was designed to capture the dynamics of and responses to the crisis in real time from deep within civic space. Figure 1 shows the research process.

Rather than an attempt to test a pre-developed theoretical framework on our three case-study countries, the study was inductive in nature. We started from the proposition that in this conjuncture, authorities in these countries might be expected to take advantage of the crisis to consolidate their power in ways reminiscent of their authoritarian pasts and, in so doing, accelerate and exacerbate ongoing alterations in the nature of civic space. From real-time and retrospective in-country and cross-country analysis of the case-study data there emerged five tendencies, which the research team subjected to interpretive analysis. The argument that emerges from our inductive analysis is that aspects of the governments' pandemic responses contributed to accelerating and exacerbating the shrinking of civic space in a way that was systematically patterned and may point to intentional long-term consequences. These, I argue, amount to a "governance shock doctrine" analogous to Klein's "economic shock doctrine."

Baseline studies were first conducted in each country to understand recent trends relating to civic space (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2020; Khan, 2020; Pereira & Forquilha, 2020). Event-tracking systems were set up to scan

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[3]Though not necessarily shrinking for all civil society actors: civic space appears to be available for what Chandhoke (2001) terms "the darker side" of social capital and civil society, and Youngs (2018) calls "conservative civil society"—those promoting nationalist, chauvinist, patriarchal, or anti-rights agendas—but ever narrower for those opposing these agendas.
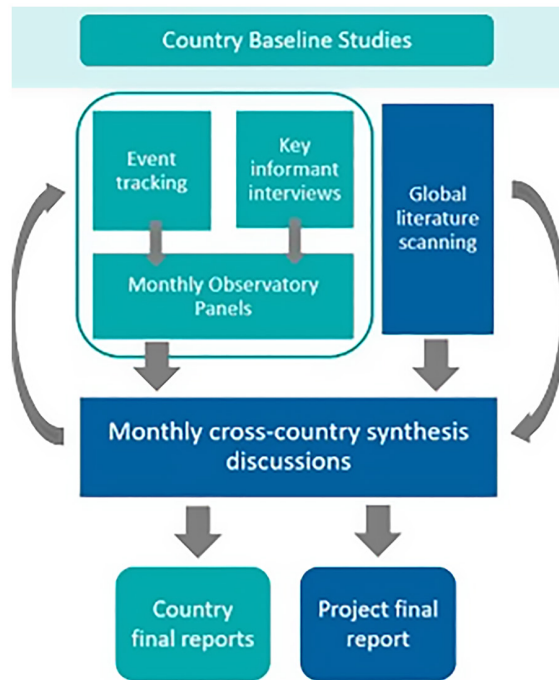
FIGURE 1 The research process.

media and social media coverage over June–December 2020 to identify relevant events and debates. Observatory panels of around 10 carefully selected civil society leaders were constituted in each country and convened monthly for online deliberation and debate on key themes and issues of the day over the period, often nourished by insights emerging from the events tracking. Key informant interviews were conducted with other civil society members and activists, filling in gaps in observatory panel members' regional or thematic knowledge, or following up on particular issues. Unpublished monthly reports produced by each country team summarized observations and insights and served as the basis for discussion at monthly cross-country synthesis meetings. In these meetings, captured in unpublished monthly synthesis notes, the whole team debated and analysed data from all of these sources, which informed new lines of enquiry over the coming month. A global scanning exercise went on throughout, identifying and producing unpublished monthly summaries of new research and commentary coming out on pandemic, governance, and civic space. After six months, three country reports were prepared (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Pereira & Forquilha, 2021), from which a cross-country synthesis report was written (Anderson et al., 2021).[4]

This in-depth, real-time, grounded, empirically led approach generated rich, situated data and nuanced interpretation and analysis on the dynamics of civic space in these three countries over this extraordinary period, as experienced and interpreted by civil society actors, in comparative perspective and against a fast-shifting global backdrop. While these actors were all long-term observers of national-level civic space, what the observatory space did was to focus their attention on how pre-pandemic trends evolved under pandemic conditions, and to bring their insights and interpretations into comparative perspective with those of peers in other difficult settings. It is this cross-country perspective which throws into relief how patterned the trends of acceleration and exacerbation of pre-existing closure of civic space are, constituting the basis of the "governance shock doctrine" proposition.

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[4]Further methodological detail on this study is available in Anderson et al. (2021), and a fuller discussion of the methodological approach of the overall A4EA research programme is offered in Joshi (2023) and Gaventa (2023).

4 | RESEARCH CONTEXT

There are, of course, significant differences between Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan. However, they share many characteristics that are highly relevant to civic space. They are characterized by being both open and closed regimes—neither strongly autocratic nor liberal and democratic. They share histories of colonization and post-colonial repressive military and single-party rule, with Nigeria under intermittent military rule until 1999, Pakistan until 2007, and Mozambique still ruled by the dominant Frelimo movement party since it won the liberation war in 1975. Conflict and violence persists to this day, at least in parts of each country, amid high levels of poverty and inequality (Gaventa, 2023). Governance relationships are marked by citizens' low trust in governments' capacity to govern with fairness and probity and to provide for basic needs (Transparency International, 2020). These situations make all three countries fragile in terms of their security situations, position security forces in relatively strong positions in the countries' governance relationships, and provide ready justification for constraints on democratic freedoms in the name of national security. In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic civic space narrowed in all three countries in respect of CSO registration and functioning; press freedoms; and online space and digital rights and freedoms (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2020; Khan, 2020; Pereira & Forquilha, 2020).

Whether despite these challenging conditions or because of them, each country has a vibrant civil society and some history of protest, contestation, or the mobilization of social power[5] in response to their regimes' use of coercive power. Nigeria and Pakistan have dense, extensive, and established civil societies. In Pakistan, where government favours CSOs focused on service delivery and humanitarian assistance, a solid minority has nonetheless managed to work on contentious issues of gender justice, human rights and democratization, and mobilized to protect civic space or challenge government outright at key junctures (Khan, 2020). In Nigeria, civic solidarity action is also common, but protest activity has risen over the last decade (Akomolafe, 2020). In Mozambique, the development of civil society has been restricted by strong single-party rule and the dominance of party-affiliated mass membership organizations. While civil society has spread since the 1990s and branched out into the realm of rights and governance, CSOs that are independent of government depend heavily on foreign donors' funds and agendas (Pereira & Forquilha, 2020). The three countries rank low in global indicators for citizen voice and accountability, with Mozambique falling steadily over the past 15 years and Nigeria and Pakistan both decreasing since 2015 (World Bank, 2023). The relatively strong "voice" developed by Pakistani and Nigerian civil societies does not equate with strong influence, and much less with strong accountability responses from the state. Global trends of increasing authoritarianism and narrowing civic space are well represented by these countries (Gaventa, 2023).

When the pandemic struck in early 2020, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan were affected differently. Space precludes a comprehensive account of how infection rates evolved and how governments responded,[6] but suffice it to note that infection rates were initially low and the spread relatively slow. Each country responded by imposing states of emergency or exceptional restrictions on individual freedoms and changes to health services, tempered with some degree of economic stimulus or social protection packages and relief to those most vulnerable to livelihood and health shocks. The next section presents our findings on how civic space was affected.

5 | WHAT HAPPENED TO CIVIC SPACE DURING THE PANDEMIC?

From March 2020 onwards all three countries experienced a complex shock consisting of both the pandemic itself and government responses to it, all overlaid and intertwined with other major simultaneous catastrophic events. Longstanding conflicts flared up in Kaduna, in northern Nigeria (Olapujo, 2020) and in Cabo Delgado, in northern

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[5]Used here following Batliwala (2019, p. 12): "Social power is the capacity of different individuals or groups [in society] to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda."

[6]A full account is provided in Section 2 of Anderson et al. (2021) and in the final country reports (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Pereira & Forquilha, 2021).

Mozambique (Pereira & Forquilha, 2021). Disaster struck in Pakistan in the form of floods (ReliefWeb, 2020). Economic crises followed hard on the heels of the virus: the oil price collapsed in Nigeria (Ayoade, 2020); Pakistan's economy was engulfed in devaluation and soaring inflation (Shahzad, 2020); and global energy companies cancelled hugely lucrative natural gas contracts in northern Mozambique (Pereira & Forquilha, 2021). Acute political-electoral tensions made themselves felt, particularly between the governing Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and a new opposition coalition in Pakistan and arising from public outrage at police brutality in the form of the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

Patterns of legislative and policy measures and implementation practices emerged swiftly across the three countries, with five features standing out as having particular implications for civic space. First, the policy response tended to "securitize" the public health emergency, entailing widespread overreach of powers by the executive, police, and security forces. Second, the centralizing effect of newly self-awarded executive powers led to disputes with sub-national governance structures over pandemic management, differing rules and allocation of resources. Third, dissent was met with systematic suppression, spawning myriad human rights abuses. Fourth, press freedom came under consistent attack: restrictions were imposed on reporting on the pandemic, policy responses to it, conflicts, and popular protests; critical journalists were harassed or persecuted; and "fake news" narratives and disinformation were propagated to undermine their reporting. Fifth, as civic action responded to the prohibition of public gatherings by moving more decisively online, authorities moved swiftly to regulate online speech and to make their own use of social media platforms, ostensibly to combat cybercrime, "fake news" or "immoral," "divisive," or "anti-patriotic" content. I analyse each in turn.

5.1 | Executive overreach and securitization

In common with many countries around the world, the pandemic triggered emergency legislation and "lockdown" restrictions on public gathering, travel, education, and business in all three countries. On March 30, 2020, the President of Mozambique addressed the nation and declared a State of Emergency "for reasons of public calamity" for the first time in the nation's democratic history, and the Nigerian federal government signed Covid Regulations 1, giving legal backing to lockdown restrictions already in place in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja since March 21. In late March the province of Sindh in Pakistan also initiated its first full lockdown, closely followed by the rest of the country.

In all countries this represented a significant shift towards executive authority. In Nigeria the usual measures for triggering oversight of new legislation, requiring consultation and public and parliamentary debate, were bypassed under emergency legislation. In Pakistan a new body, the National Command Operation Centre, was created to oversee the pandemic response, chaired by the Minister of Defence and involving several military representatives (Syed, 2020). Participants in our Pakistan observatory panel saw this as the start of a "clawback mode" in which the military sought to regain some of the political power devolved to provinces and the elected government; they noted how the government opted to issue regulations rather than pass legislation, thus avoiding parliamentary debate. In Mozambique, our panel saw the State of Emergency as significantly "exaggerated" and violating fundamental rights, observing that it was extended beyond constitutional provisions through the passing of a new law in August.

Lockdown restrictions gave new space for "overreach" from authorities, in particular police and security forces. Lack of clarity on hastily enacted and poorly communicated rules gave free rein to a heavily securitized response to a public health issue. In Mozambique and Nigeria reports quickly emerged of excessive force being used to administer lockdown measures (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2021; Agente da polícia assassinado, 2020). In both countries this included not only reports of arrests and extortion, but also allegations of extrajudicial killings by police for minor infractions like not wearing face masks in public. In Nigeria, reports of police using the threat of lockdown enforcements to sexually assault women alarmed rights advocates, and police arrested people in border areas for breaking interstate travel bans while going about daily life (National Human Rights Commission, 2020). By July, a report by Bloomberg highlighted that the security response was "deadlier than the disease" (Olurounbi, 2020).

As the first wave of transmission waned, the securitization trend continued. In Mozambique, the State of Emergency was extended three times, and in August 2020 the President announced a new "state of public calamity" for an indeterminate period (Issufo, 2020). In Nigeria, the federal government introduced new legislation, the Infectious Disease Bill 2020, that granted powers to law enforcement officers to apprehend people suffering from infectious diseases, and unparalleled powers to the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control to detain members of the public and minors indefinitely (Fund for Global Human Rights, 2020).

5.2 | Centralization and sub-national disparities

The need for decisive action in the face of the pandemic saw not only a shift of power towards the executive or military, but also a centralization of authority, which increased tensions between national and sub-national authorities (Across the world, 2020; Javid et al., 2020; Khan Mohmand et al., 2021; Ndoen et al., 2020). This has consequences for the locally empowering and democratizing effects—actual or potential—of each country's decentralization trajectories to date. In Mozambique, our observatory panel saw the State of Emergency as centralizing decision-making further still in a context where local authorities lacked significant discretion in the first place. In Pakistan, the federal government revived the debate over decentralization itself, suggesting revision of the 18th Amendment of the Constitution that provides for devolved budgets and authority (Ayub, 2020).

Tensions also emerged in different approaches to the pandemic between national and sub-national authorities. In Pakistan, where Sindh was the only province not governed by the national ruling party PTI and the one that quickly adopted World Health Organization (WHO) advice in the face of national government's rejection of it, conflict persisted between the two levels of government throughout the year (Afzal, 2020). In Nigeria, inconsistency between national and state or local regulations meant that companies complying with federal regulations were found to be violating local laws.

There were also tensions regarding the distribution of pandemic relief and aid. In Nigeria, state governors of oil-producing states claimed that they were overlooked in the "palliatives" of COVID relief (Ebiri & Godwin, 2020; Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2021). In Pakistan, our panel heard reports of political friction when the federal government refused emergency assistance to the Government of Balochistan for relief rations for those in quarantine.

These tensions and differences combined with sub-national conflicts to make civic space far from uniform across the countries. In Mozambique, our observatory panel saw not only significantly more curtailed space in areas of violent conflict, but also stark urban–rural divides in the evolution of civic space across the country. Organizations outside the capital were reportedly less able to adapt to online forms of action and support, given lower connectivity, resources, and skills. A coalition of CSOs established to monitor COVID emergency funds included no organizations outside the capital. In Pakistan, the differences in opposition-run Sindh and in more conflictual areas, where forced disappearances and lack of access to information were more common, were seen as crucial to understand experiences of civic space. For our Nigerian panel members, the exploitation of tensions in states like South Kaduna and Kano highlighted perceived differences in freedoms in the south versus the north of Nigeria. They reflected that civic actors in the north were more vulnerable to crackdowns linked to freedom of expression relating to faith, religion, and morality while their counterparts in the south were more likely to get into trouble for critical commentary directed at state actors.

5.3 | The suppression of dissent

Alongside these attacks on human rights, lockdown restrictions, and the "securitization" response had the immediate effect of reducing the civic space available to challenge authorities, thus enabling the suppression of dissent. With gatherings forbidden and new rules regulating freedom of movement, physical protests were banned, heavily policed, or selectively allowed depending on their political hue (Anderson et al., 2020).

In all three countries the already familiar tactic of forced disappearance continued. In Mozambique and Pakistan this phenomenon particularly affected journalists—in Mozambique those reporting from the conflict-affected Cabo Delgado province (MISA, 2020), and in Pakistan those questioning the securitization of the state (Ali, 2020). In Pakistan, where forced disappearances had long been an issue in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, they were reported as increasing in Sindh. In Nigeria, following the #EndSARS protests in October 2020 numerous reported incidents of missing persons were highlighted by civil society watchdogs (Spaces for Change, 2021, p. 73).

Long-running attempts to increase state powers to regulate civil society actors continued. In Pakistan official registration requirements for CSOs increased and were used to pressurize and limit the freedom of civic actors or rescind their registration. In Nigeria, the Companies and Allied Matters Act, on the table pre-pandemic, was passed in August 2020, provoking comments from the Nigerian Action Group on Free Civic Space that although the act was meant to focus on corporate governance, it actually empowered authorities to restrict CSO operations and freedom of association (Spaces for Change, 2020). Several CSOs that had supported #EndSARS protesters and joined their calls for accountability were subsequently de-registered (Spaces for Change, 2021).

Individual activists and dissenting voices were pressured by authorities and punished for their protest actions. Across cities in Pakistan students mobilized in November 2020 in the third annual Student Solidarity March, adding to their existing demands the pandemic-related problems that had emerged in Pakistan's education system (Jan, 2020a). After the march, a detention order was issued in Lahore against academic and activist Ammar Ali Jan (Jan, 2020b), clearly written in such a way as to instil a climate of fear among activists. In Nigeria, government response to #EndSARS included targeting individual activists and supporters with arrests, travel bans, passport removal, or blocking their bank accounts (Adams, 2020). Authorities also targeted activists through the courts, for example listing prominent celebrities as defendants in a lawsuit accusing them of using Twitter for "the promotion of unlawful assembly" (Spaces for Change, 2021). In the city of Beira in Mozambique, a strike co-ordinated by business owners closed businesses for three days in protest at insecurity and a spate of kidnappings was met with threats to fine businesses for actions "contrary to public interests" (Olapujo, 2020).

5.4 | Limits on freedom of press and expression

Just as the pandemic heightened ruling actors' exposure to critiques, it appears also to have increased their sensitivity to criticism. Press freedom came under pressure in all three countries. In Nigeria data gathered by Spaces for Change indicate an increase in attacks on freedom of speech during 2020. In March the Nigerian Presidency barred some media outlets from covering its activities, limiting their ability to cover the pandemic response (Nwogu, 2020). During the #EndSARS protests photojournalists were reportedly targeted and attacked by security services, and news outlets fined and threatened with closure by the National Broadcasting Commission for "unprofessional coverage" of the protests (Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2020). In Mozambique, the offices of *Canal* newspaper were attacked and set on fire in August, four days after publishing an investigation into fraudulent contracts that benefitted the ruling party elite (Amnistia Internacional Portugal, 2020). Press access and media reporting on the conflict in Cabo Delgado was greatly impaired, with journalists arrested or disappeared. Observatory panel members reported that only one local radio station in the region was still operating by November and suspected that TV news channel coverage was controlled by authorities.

In Pakistan, journalists critical of the ruling party or military continued to be targeted by the authorities. Several disappearances or kidnappings of male journalists brought about protests. Female journalists were subjected to sustained harassment and death and rape threats online. In August 2020 a group of well-known female journalists submitted a joint statement about harassment by individuals linked to the ruling party against women journalists who had criticized the government's handling of the pandemic (Gossman, 2020). Numerous other journalists came under investigation by the Federal Investigation Agency. In July 2020, shortly after press outcry over another disappearance, a paramilitary force called the Rangers raided the Karachi Press Club (Outcry over Rangers, 2020). The Pakistan

observatory panel discussed instances where media outlets appeared to be punished with loss of advertising when their coverage was critical of the government.

In the context of uncertainty and conflicting information that the pandemic brought, and in keeping with the emerging tactics of authoritarian leaders worldwide, governments made accusations of "fake news" to undermine independent reporting and narratives. In Mozambique, the President publicly accused the independent press of spreading fake news in November 2020, specifically related to their coverage of the conflict in the north, and encouraged the military to suppress such coverage (MISA, 2020). In Pakistan, the journalist Ahmed Noorani's exposé of a prominent political aide prompted a news channel to accuse him of spreading anti-state fake news, spurring death threats online (Noorani, 2020). In Nigeria, authorities responded to the #EndSARS protests by spreading disinformation on CSOs and outlets involved in reporting and assisting the campaign (Spaces for Change, 2021).

The targeting of critical journalists and accusations of fake news is significant. Our panels reported that even independent media outlets—whether traditional outlets or online publications and sources—can no longer be trusted to reflect the situation on the ground, silenced through self-censorship in an atmosphere of fear.

5.5 | Tightening online space

The public health measures closed down many "offline" spaces for protest, hastening a move to online spaces. However, as civic action moved online, so did efforts to undermine and regulate it and silence critical voices. One of our researchers spoke of the surge in digital action at the start of the pandemic as a "moment in the sun" before authorities caught up. Another described social media as a "double-edged sword" for online activists, given their subsequent targeting by authorities and the facility and speed with which online spaces became channels for surveillance, harassment, and threats. Such was the case of the Pakistani women journalists mentioned above, one of whom described her Twitter timeline being flooded with abuse. Our cross-country observatory panel noted the ways that such attacks led to self-censorship by activists, stopping them from speaking out online for fear of reprisals.

Legal regulations were used in both Pakistan and Nigeria to increase state control of digital tools and spaces and limit free expression. In Pakistan the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) was used to investigate and arrest journalists for online posts, under charges of defamation. Stricter requirements of social media companies, including sharing unencrypted data with authorities, were introduced early in 2020 (Abbasi, 2020). A variety of popular apps were banned over the remainder of the year, with some suggesting that the block on TikTok was related to the emergence of political content on the platform (Masood, 2020). The Supreme Court hinted at the possibility of reinstating a ban on YouTube for inciting hatred against members of the judiciary, government, and armed forces (Malik, 2020). In October 2020 new regulations were passed under the PECA requiring data localization and granting further wide-ranging powers to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority to determine what content is unlawful and issue blanket bans, including for material that threatens "public order" (Hashim, 2020). In Nigeria, the 2015 Cybercrime Act has often been used to intimidate online journalists and citizens (Ibezim-Ohaeri, 2021) and terrorism legislation was also used to target and detain individuals for online posts critical of government (DSS must release Emperor Ogbonna, 2020).

Table 1, compiled from a review of our three country reports and unpublished monthly country reports and cross-country syntheses, offers a summary illustration of the five dimensions of policy measures and practices adopted in the three contexts, showing how uniform this pattern was and how similar the measures, contextual differences notwithstanding.

Alongside the myriad limitations implied in the restrictions on assembly, association, and expression described above—both "normal" COVID-related restrictions and targeted anti-activist restrictions—CSOs, civic movements, and their constituencies were experiencing profound livelihood collapses, social fragmentation, and funding crises as normal service delivery and markets broke down and international aid and public funding were rapidly channelled towards the pandemic response. Despite this, our research captured some interesting shifts in civil action in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan in this short period, to which we now turn.

TABLE 1 Illustrations of five aspects of pandemic response prevalent in all three countries.

Country Dimension	Pakistan	Nigeria	Mozambique
Executive overreach and securitization	Tendency to issue regulations instead of legislation, thus avoiding parliamentary process. Federal Government created Minister of Defence-led and military-dominated National Command Operation Centre to oversee pandemic response.	Several new laws passed under COVID special legislative regime, avoiding consultation and public and parliamentary debate usually required. Nigerian security agents' response to covid "deadlier than the disease"; they killed 18 people between 1–15 March while COVID-19 killed 11 (Olurounbi, 2020).	Temporary State of Emergency declared 20 March 2020; extended three times, beyond constitutional provision; new State of public calamity law passed August 2020, of indeterminate duration. Four people assassinated by police in first four months of State of Emergency (Agente da polícia assassinado, 2020)
Centralization and sub-national disparities	Federal government re-opened contentious debate on 2010 18th Amendment which afforded decentralized and devolved powers to Provinces, June 2020.	Crackdown on Northern civic actors' freedom of expression regarding faith, religion, and morality (Nigeria monthly report, August 2020); accusations of anti-South bias in distribution of COVID relief supplies.	Observatory panel noted few significant tensions between national and sub-national government in COVID response, as decision-making still highly centralized in Mozambique (Monthly report, July 2020). Independent (CSO) monitoring of COVID-19 funding heavily centralized; practically non-existent in provinces.
Suppression of dissent	November 2020 Student Solidarity March triggered unconstitutional detention orders against student leaders and overt intimidation of this civil society sector. Applications to hold rallies by combined opposition movement the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) were refused on grounds of public health while rallies by sectarian political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) permitted.	#EndSARS protest (October 2020) met with police brutality and deregistration of supportive CSOs Companies and Allied Matters Act passed August 2020 with several provisions which restrict the civic space and limit constitutionally protected freedoms (Anderson et al., 2021).	State-supported or state-instigated harassment and defamation campaign against former Bishop of Pemba, Dom Luíz Fernando Lisboa, for leading role in public denunciation of conflict situation in Cabo Delgado.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Country Dimension	Pakistan	Nigeria	Mozambique
Limits on freedom of press and expression	Women journalists who criticized government's handling of pandemic targeted with extreme trolling and harassment, August 2020. Raid on Karachi Press Club by paramilitary force, July 2020.	Nigerian Presidency barred some media outlets from covering its activities, limiting their ability to cover the pandemic response, March 2020 (Anderson et al., 2021) Systematic disinformation offensive by authorities against CSOs and media outlets reporting on and supporting #EndSARS campaign (Anderson et al., 2021)	*Canal de Moçambique* newspaper offices subjected to arson attack after investigating party elite's involvement in fraudulent contracts, August 2020. President accused independent press of fake news for coverage of conflict in Cabo Delgado and encouraged military to suppress this, November 2020.
Tightening online space	Coverage of PECA 2016 extended to apply blanket bans on digital content, October 2020 PECA used to charge journalists for defamation in online posts accusing a celebrity of sexual harassment, Sept 2020 49 journalists and social media activists subjected to "frivolous charges" under PECA according to Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, Sept 2020.	Terrorism Prevention Act used to detain human rights lawyer for online post critical of government.	Presidential Decree 11/2020, under COVID-19 State of Emergency enables state to monitor people's movements based on data provided by national telecommunications operators, in violation of Article 71 of Constitution (Nhanale, 2021).

5.6 | What happened to civic activism?

Civil society in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan did not passively endure either the pandemic or concurrent restrictions. It responded in multiple ways on many fronts, including some significant changes in its ways of working. While these changes are not driven directly by the pandemic and governments' responses to it, they are clearly associated with it, happening in some cases because of, and in other cases in spite of, the narrowing of civic actors' operating space. None was completely without precedent. What changed was the salience of particular issues, kinds of actor, and repertoires of action during this period.

Drawn out by the rising salience of issues such as health care, COVID relief, and increased gender-based violence, and driven to the fore by the newly restrictive environment, new actors and coalitions became visible. While the various pressures divided civil society, particularly in Pakistan, they also forced the emergence of some new alliances between a wider range of civic actors in order to resist the closure of spaces more effectively. This change in all three countries is well summarized in a quote from our Nigeria research team: "Activism is no longer the exclusive preserve of civil society, trade unions and media advocates, but a wider group of private actors and associational bodies campaigning extensively online and offline against various social issues, injustices and restrictions" (Ibezim-Ohaeri

& Ibeh, 2021, p. 33). In some cases new civic alliances were associated with the consolidation of political opposition to incumbent governments—notably in Pakistan, where the 11-party opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement, formed in September 2020 to challenge the military's interference in politics and force the government to resign, led to the ousting of President Imran Khan in April 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2020).

With these shifts in actors came adaptation and expansion of the usual repertoires of action, so that civil society actors could operate effectively and safely in the available space. The spread of digital protest sped up. Citizen oversight mechanisms sprang up to monitor COVID-19 emergency relief distribution, often emboldened by moral indignation at government's opaque handling of it and empowered by digital technologies. In an intensification of the tendency noted by Youngs in the pre-pandemic period (Youngs, 2019), unruly expressions of popular politics became common. We see more speaking truth to power, less fear of authorities despite authorities' ebullience and in some cases entrenched brutality[7]; more use of citizen-generated evidence to contest official narratives, mobilize opposition, and shame governments into responding to abuses and to needs. The shifts in repertoire reflect declining trust between citizens and governments at this juncture, where the status quo within societies has been laid bare and its fairness deeply, and often indignantly, questioned.

Broadly speaking, we see civil society adapting and diversifying for survival, using a combination of strategies. In some cases, civil society actors have *weathered* the crisis and the civic-space-restricting measures by resorting to the least controversial forms of pandemic response, aid and relief. In others, they have *circumvented* the measures, continuing to advocate for rights, claiming accountability from their states, and extending their accountability demands to governments' often mismanaged pandemic responses. For instance, in Nigeria the CSO networks ANEEJ and MANTRA instituted nationwide monitoring of palliative relief funds; and in Mozambique the Budget Monitoring Forum monitored government procurement processes and expenditure of international COVID relief funds, and tracked and analysed Ministry of Health accounts. In yet other cases, civil society actors have directly and vocally *countered* the restrictions on civic space embodied in the governance shock doctrine itself: in one such example, Spaces for Change in Nigeria tracked and vociferously denounced the tightening of civic space and mounting pressure on civic activism from early on in the pandemic (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Ibeh, 2020).

6 | GOVERNANCE SHOCK DOCTRINE

The paradox that surfaces is how acutely a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic accentuates the need for a vibrant, assertive civil society, and yet how severely the space for it deteriorated over the pandemic period, in an acceleration and magnification of prior trends. In the short period between the declaration of the pandemic and the conclusion of our research (March–December 2020) it was urgent for the governments of Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan to control the spread of the pandemic and deploy already overstretched health facilities, personnel, and funding to treat the seriously ill, for which they needed help from civil society. Despite this, the governments seized the moment to reset power and governance relations. The changes consisted partly of altered practices—emboldened law enforcement agents acting overzealously, entrepreneurial surveillance agencies expanding into the new opportunities afforded by the shift into online environments—and partly of changed policies and laws, some couched in temporary legal regimes such as states of emergency that have now expired, but others of indefinite duration. Most of these measures and practices were not directly health-related and they were remarkably similar across these countries despite diverse exposure to the virus and varying needs. After years of gradual deterioration, in this short period civic space in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan, as an environment in which people and associations could actively organize, speak out, protest, dissent, and help each other without fear of official disapproval or harassment and without breaking the law, declined drastically.

Our collective analysis pointed to something more than three contextually appropriate and coincidentally similar policy responses to a global crisis. The five tendencies that emerged from our data—securitization of the public

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[7]Most notably in the case of the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria (Adams, 2020; Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2020; Spaces for Change, 2021).

health emergency, suppression of dissent, extension and centralization of executive powers, curtailment of press freedoms, and rapid tightening of online space—are internally coherent and constitute a pattern, such that they attest to an underlying doctrine. In the domain of public administration and governance, doctrine has been described as "ideologically informed principles that guide practices of administration or implementation" (Hummel, 1989, p. 191), and "normative, ideological sources of action which can [...] be expected to orient decisions and immediate activities" (Hajnal & Rosta, 2016, p. 407).

Given the rapid introduction of the five sets of policy measures in the crisis context of COVID, we saw striking parallels with Klein's concept of "corporativist" economic shock therapy, which she argues is systematically applied in the wake of and under cover of crises (Klein, 2007, p. 15). She explains economic shock doctrine as referring to a political strategy, a philosophy of power reflecting commonality of interests between corporate and political elites (Klein & Smith, 2008, p. 582). Analysing civic space in the context of Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan during the pandemic, we see a political strategy applied under cover of the pandemic which consolidates the common interests of governments and their security apparatus in ways that limit the democratic space for and freedoms of civil society, transforming the conditions for civic activism and governance relations into the future: a governance shock doctrine.

The pandemic governance shock doctrine mounts a direct challenge to the development consensus that has dominated development and international aid policy and practice since the 2000s, based on liberal democratic values of transparency, participation, accountability, and inclusion (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). The common ground uniting these four principles is that they all point to and support "a greater role for citizens in the functioning of the state" (ibid., 2014, p. 11), making vibrant civil societies operating in free and open civic space emblematic of this consensus. It has underpinned not only development aid, international co-operation, and diplomatic policy dialogue during the recent era, but also domestic policy frameworks in the global North and South.

Carothers and Brechenmacher situate this "new development consensus" as the third of three stages that characterize the evolution of development thinking over the last 50 years:

> In stage one, from the 1960s through the 1980s, aid providers focused on state-led development without giving serious, sustained attention to how governance processes operate and evolve. In stage two, the 1990s, donors took governance on board as a crucial factor in development, yet hewed to a primarily narrow, top-down view of the concept. In stage three, from the early 2000s on, the aid community expanded its approach to governance, emphasizing the relationship between states and citizens, ideally informed by principles that embody the importance of citizens' roles (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014, p. 25).

The COVID-19 governance shock doctrine belongs to a stage four, in which aid-recipient governments as well as aid-provider governments swing away from stage three's citizen-centric approach and the large-scale expansion and strengthening of civil societies and civic space it generated almost the whole world over. In its place they reinstate an autocratic mode of governance, in practical terms denoted by a much-reduced and circumscribed civic space, populated by organizations that extend the state's welfarist reach but are disqualified from serious engagement in governance and exist on the basis of tolerance rather than civic rights and freedoms (Alizada et al., 2021; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022).

While the exact contours and severity of the governance shock doctrine in the three case-study countries could not be foreseen, pre-pandemic trends meant it was not a surprise in these contexts, particularly given the global scale of the phenomenon of shrinking civic space. Klein observes that shocks lose some of their potency through overuse:

> today, even the cataclysmic shocks of wars and natural disasters do not always provoke the level of disorientation required to impose unwanted economic shock therapy. There are just too many people in the world who have had direct experience with the shock doctrine: they know how it works, ...the crucial element of surprise is missing (Klein, 2007, p. 459).

The reinvigoration and new configurations of civic activism that our research and others have documented since early 2020 (Nampoothiri & Artuso, 2021; Youngs, 2020) show that the governance shock doctrine of the pandemic era is not hegemonic, and suggest that it may not last long. While the governance shock doctrine made civic space a harder and more dangerous place for activism and the nature of coercive power shifted on the government side, social power also shifted in its basis, manifestations, and possibly its durability. What remains to be seen is how the strategies of social actors to weather, circumvent, and contest the COVID-19 governance shock doctrine will fare in the post-pandemic era.

7 | IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CIVIC SPACE[8]

The context for social and political action for empowerment and accountability and civic action itself in Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan, and many other countries across the globe, is not only temporarily reshaped by the COVID-19 crisis but also reconfigured in the long term. While our empirical research focused on these three countries, other evidence attests to the application of this governance shock doctrine in many other countries, both established democracies within the wealthy countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and poorer countries with more mixed governance regimes and tentative democratization processes (Alizada et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2021, p. 42; Balogun & Frinjuah, 2020; Bethke & Wolff, 2020).

Two years after the onset of COVID-19, the global discourse shifted from anticipating the end of the pandemic to "living with the pandemic." As has been pointed out elsewhere, measures adopted in emergency situations have a tendency to persist and become permanent (ICNL, 2021; Klein, 2007; Rutzen & Dutta, 2020). In this case, they threaten to lock civil society around the world into living with pandemic-era restrictions. Dilemmas abound for CSOs operating in difficult settings like Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan in the post-COVID era and for the international allies and funders who seek to support them. Our evidence points to two sets of implications for those concerned about the future of civic space, relating on the one hand to protecting civic space itself and on the other to nurturing politically astute civil society and civic activism.

7.1 | Protecting civic space

Civic space matters not only intrinsically to democracies but instrumentally for the achievement of human progress as embodied in the contemporary core global agendas, such as Agenda 2030 and the Open Government Partnership (Hossain et al., 2019). Given what has happened to civic space under COVID, the donor governments, multilateral institutions, and international non-governmental organization (NGO) community that invest so heavily in these global compacts now need to attend in a much more focused and sustained way to holding open civic space as a vital precondition for their attainment. The Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance adopted by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in July 2021 sets out a comprehensive range of ways for its Adherents to do this (OECD DAC, 2021). More broadly, donors need to base

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[8]This section draws particularly on discussions between representatives of national and international civil society, the human rights community, and scholars of civic activism in an online Round Table meeting convened by the Navigating civic space in a time of covid research project on May 21, 2021.

their work on promoting democracy and strengthening civil society on lessons drawn from working in the least democratic settings and in less democratic global eras in the past.[9] That all aid-donor countries will automatically concern themselves with this is neither axiomatic nor uncomplicated: many of the traditional donor countries themselves applied the pandemic governance shock doctrine domestically to some degree (Alizada et al., 2021; Lührmann et al., 2020; Narsee, 2022).

There is no reason to expect all the pandemic-induced legal and policy changes affecting civic space to be repealed automatically in the post-pandemic context, nor to assume that newly empowered actors such as forces of law and order and surveillance agencies will willingly rein in their pandemic-era practices. Many civic-space-tightening measures will recede only if they are confronted by concerted campaigns to reopen or hold open civic space. To the extent that they can do so unhypocritically given their own pandemic-era performance in respect of civic space, the international partners of governments which have presided over decisive shrinkage of civic space need to actively uphold the expectation that pandemic-induced restrictions and emergency legislation affecting the civic space will be lifted and invest their own political capital in improving the enabling environment for activism.[10] Bilateral and multilateral donors and other foreign policy actors who endorse democracy and human rights would do well to push a rights-based discourse non-selectively, working for consistency between the different policy domains of their bilateral and multilateral relationships, in particular aid, trade, and defence.

In terms of aid modalities, donors need to recognize and address the limited scope, in this increasingly hostile climate, of projectized, tightly timebound development aid programmes to contribute effectively to transformative agendas such as the reversal of democratic backsliding and the systematic suppression of civic space. In crisis settings where government–civil society relations have long been acutely polarized, such as Colombia, when government-to-government aid has been played down because of donors' human rights concerns, non-governmental channels, and international solidarity approaches have played an especially important role (McGee, 2010). Donor support is needed for new coalitions that emerged under pandemic conditions to experiment and find their post-pandemic niches in the accountability ecosystem. The ambit of aid donors' civil-society-strengthening work should be extended to digital civic space and activism which, in light of how it has been abused, particularly under the pandemic, cries out for its own protective regulation and monitoring as part of the overall civic space.

Beyond their own aid modalities, aid-donor governments, multilateral institutions, and philanthropic foundations should become more critically engaged with the global enablers of autocratic rulers, such as foreign investors and trade agendas, that can so undermine accountable democratic governance, particularly in difficult settings where corporate governance is weak and power inequalities high.

7.2 | Nurturing politically astute civil society and civic activism

The "de-democratizing" shifts in citizen–state relations we have seen intensify during the pandemic call for restrategizing, repositioning, and retooling on the part of advocates of democracy and accountable governance at all levels. Activists and civic organizations will have difficult choices to make and will need to tread carefully between the relative safety of "weathering" strategies such as sticking to service provision roles, and the risks—life-threatening in the worst cases—associated with more vocal and oppositional "circumventing" or "countering" strategies.

In contexts where civil society, civic space, and government notions of accountability have hitherto been heavily shaped by international aid, a particularly promising development has been the defence of civic space and assertion of accountability claims during the pandemic by domestic social actors, independent of foreign donors or international NGOs. For the growth and spread of this accountability-claiming culture it will be crucial that citizens and

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[9]The published evidence on this is small, but examples include McGee (2010), Christie and Green (2019), and Koester et al. (2016).

[10]A point also made by Tom Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Carothers, 2021).

their organizations extend into the post-pandemic context the solidarity instinct that characterized their pandemic responses, building and maintaining alliances with each other across causes and identities.

Activists have circumvented COVID-related constraints and gained room for manoeuvre through the expansion of civic space into the online realm and the rapid innovation of digital activism repertoires. Yet, at the same time civic activists have seen how quickly repression too moved online, and how readily and potently information technologies were deployed to impose and enforce the governance shock doctrine. Digital activism in the post-pandemic context will surely be informed by greater political awareness and critical caution towards the anti-democratic dimensions of digital technologies.

As social actors in the harshest and longest-restricted settings know only too well, when civic space is restricted civil society is forced to become more politically aware in its strategies, advocacy targets, and in terms of its own make-up and ways of working. Increased attention by civil society actors to their own accountability and effectiveness would be a timely way to enhance their credibility and consolidate emerging new configurations of alliances, movements, and networks.[11] We are likely to see more of techniques such as legal activism, including the invoking of regional and international rights frameworks to defend both civic activists and the space itself from state persecution (Macdowell Santos, 2007). Techniques like shaping and controlling narrative, engaging CSOs and citizens in countering stigmatizing narratives with rights-based and depolarizing discourse, are likely to gain ground in the civic activism repertoires alongside more traditional tactics (Healey & Hinson, 2020). Such discursive techniques will gain in importance as counterbalances to the erosion of democratic norms, accelerated during the pandemic by state tactics like the criminalization of protest and judicial harassment of activists.

Shock doctrine, in Klein's terms, is "a way to prevent crises from giving way to organic moments where progressive policies emerge" (Solis, 2020). Yet Klein has also argued that eventually "shock wears off" (2007, pp. 443–466): in due course, people, organizations, and movements shed the collective fear instilled by the shock, regroup, and resume their prior economic and livelihood projects, reinforced by lessons in resilience learnt from this and past shocks. An energetic mobilization among national and international actors to reassert and protect civic space is needed if the erosion of civil liberties and normalization of autocratic governance wrought by the political-military apparatus in so many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic is not to become permanent, and if the inspired and progressive innovations in organic civic activism over the 2020–2021 crisis period are to survive and flourish.

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[11] As recognized in the recent OECD DAC recommendation (OECD DAC, 2021).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This article reports analysis of primary data. The ethics of data collection and analysis was approved by the University of Sussex Ethics Review Committee. The persons from whom the data was collected gave their free, prior, and informed consent and the data has been kept confidential.

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