



June 08, 2021 | Number 4

Inequality is a Threat to International Security

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Inequality within and among states poses not only a moral concern but also a threat to global security. In Western countries and the developing world alike, it radicalizes politics and culture and invites hostile powers to exploit division.

Analysis of global trends shows that inequality — not only of income but also education, health, and opportunity — is a major shaping factor, the root cause behind many global developments. According to most studies, while many are increasingly better off, inequality within states has grown and

inequality among states remains high.

While globalization lifted millions of people out of poverty and illiteracy, it has also highlighted and to a certain extent deepened the disparity between countries (in wages, working conditions, and standards of living), as well as within countries (among different economic sectors and between urban centers and the rural hinterland).

The transfer of manufacturing to the East as well as automation, which led to extensive loss of jobs, contributed to the rise of inequality, and the unprecedented connectivity between people all over

the globe heightened awareness and increased various forms of protest against inequality.

In the past year, the Coronavirus pandemic also highlighted several strands of inequality. Within countries, it accentuated inequality between the center and the social and geographic periphery (manifesting, among other forms, in "digital disparities" – disparities in accessibility to personal computers and wideband communications). Among countries, inequality has been highlighted by the stark disparities in access to vaccines around the world.

According to the World Health Organization, as of early April, out of the 700 million vaccines distributed globally, over 87 per cent went to high- or medium-high-income countries, while only 0.2 percent went to low-income countries.

Inequality is not just a serious social problem; it has both internal and external strategic implications and constitutes a threat to national and international security.

Growing inequality has been leading to growing tension between publics and establishments, not only in countries with authoritarian regimes, but also in the liberal democracies of the West, including the United States.

Large, frustrated, and disgruntled publics which did not enjoy the fruits of globalization and were even hurt by it in their view, rebelled against it, while populist nationalist leaders rode the wave of disaffection and spiked it at the same time.

In the internal arena, these angry publics and the leaders who lead them and are led by them, can advance radical agendas, whether through ballot boxes or the streets, and threaten the social fabric, the rule of law, democracy, and the security of individuals and groups.

In the international arena, apart from its devastating implications for millions of people, vaccine inequality plays into the hands of Chinese and Russian "vaccine diplomacy," which aims at

bolstering these powers' global image and influence at the expense of the United States and the West.

According to an [Associated Press report](#), China's vaccine diplomacy has succeeded beyond all expectations: most of the world's population, of which the lion's share reside in developing countries, may well be vaccinated with Chinese vaccines, one of which has also been recently approved for emergency use by the WHO.

Vaccine inequality also foreshadows a future where, in addition to the "classic" socioeconomic disparities within and among states, there will be a new kind of inequality — between states that can develop and afford advanced, life-changing technologies and those which can do neither.

According to the [global trends assessment](#) published recently by the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC), disparities within and among states are expected to continue to grow over the next two decades. The gap between public expectations and the ability of governments to meet them will also grow, according to the report, and this will likely lead to a further rise in political tensions, volatility, and threats to democratic legitimacy.

In Israel, residues of past inequality, as well as present disparities between the center and the social and geographical periphery, are intertwined in the schisms between Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, and the secular and religious. These rifts continue to resonate in Israeli politics and the Israeli street.

The recurrent rounds of fighting with Hamas also highlight the inequality in the availability of bomb shelters and safe-rooms in different regions of Israel, and in the public attitude toward attacks on the center and on the periphery.

Inequality, then, is an important, if not the most important, destabilizing factor in the world. It can lead, and indeed has led, to wars and civil wars. The internal threat posed by inequality can be more dangerous than "conventional" external threats,

especially when the internal and external threats converge. It is therefore necessary to define inequality as a strategic threat, and to set reducing disparities as a permanent national priority, and not only in response to crises.

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