

POL101
The Real World of Politics: An Introduction
Assignment 4
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Politics of individual responsibility is a political viewpoint that focuses on how each individual carries total accountability for their own actions. It emphasizes classical liberalism's individualistic values, such as the belief that everyone should think freely and be self-sufficient, if their activities are of their own free will and be free from external pressure (Ryan 1995). Professor Courtney Jung (2022) explains that the politics of individual responsibility is quite widespread, considering that our perception of justice is influenced by this political framework, which is pervasive in our conscious and subconscious minds. Issues such as the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic should not be viewed through the lens of personal responsibility since this act is regarded as a societal ailment with the potential to have a staggering impact on the community. The politics of individual responsibility has negative effects when adhered arbitrarily to every political problem or conflict, both personally and collectively. Therefore, this essay will explain how the personal responsibility standpoint is entirely flawed in addressing the efficacy of the COVID-19 governmental response, as well as what alternatives the government could consider making to ensure that the pandemic can be effectively curtailed.

The politics of individual responsibility becomes problematic since it leads to its polarizing discourse, between liberals and conservatives when voting on legislation and budgetary recommendations. In 2020, the American legislative branch is conflicted on how much money the government should spend on civilians who have been laid off by their companies and businesses that have incurred financial losses because of the coronavirus pandemic. The US Senate rejected a \$300 billion coronavirus stimulus package bill drafted by the Republican leadership (Nilsen and Zhou 2020). Democrats rejected the bill because the

stimulus package fell short of providing financial support to affected businesses and individuals, alongside expectations for increased spending in the healthcare sector. Republicans think that people should approach their lives with the assumption that they are ultimately responsible for what happens during the epidemic, which is why they drafted the stimulus package bill with less money allocated to economically afflicted individuals. This can be explained through the economic conservative disposition that social and economic welfare should not be distributed to the people excessively, to limit welfare “dependency” (Wiedemann and Wise 2020). Democrats, however, feel that individuals are not primarily to blame for their current situation. They rejected the stimulus package bill because it failed to address social conditions such as poverty, unemployment and other forms of inequalities, and the scarcity of financial capitals for businesses that worsen their wellbeing. Democrats believe that the government should serve as a mediator by injecting new coronavirus stimulus packages to alleviate the social and economic hardships that marginalised groups face. The split rhetoric of individual responsibility has resulted in the US government's incapacity to develop pandemic stimulus packages that equitably aid the intended stakeholders, therefore exacerbating their suffering. On the positive note, Congressional Democrats have finally passed their own economic stimulus package through the 2021 COVID-19 relief bill, which saw a \$1 trillion boost over the Republican-drafted version, which will support many Americans survive this dreadful pandemic (Khan 2021). Perhaps, reform the Senate such as lowering the 60-vote threshold and reintroducing the talking filibuster, is essential to reduce political stalemate (Ortegon 2021).

In the sake of defending freedom and liberty, governments have sometimes outsourced the burden and accountability for preventing the coronavirus pandemic to their own people. In April 2022, the government stringency index for Canada dropped from the strict 75.46 points last year to a moderately strict 63.43 points (Hale et al. 2022) as Canadian provincial governments eased restrictions such as school closures, stay-at-home lockdowns, and

mandatory face coverings starting February 2022. Provincial political leaders insisted everyone to uptake personal responsibility in complying these mandates and restrictions, additionally alleging that these public health demands had jeopardized individual liberty (Paperny and Lampert 2022). This rhetoric of individual choice is dangerous because it assumes that appropriate information is being disseminated and individuals possess the capabilities to make scientifically informed, objectively right choices. As a result, there will be fringe minorities, such as the Freedom Convoy movement, who will oppose the COVID-19 measures because, through the lens of individual responsibility, they believe that if they become ill or infected with the virus, it is all their fault. However, they fail to recognize that their actions will have an indirect impact on the marginalized communities, such as the elderly, the immunocompromised, and healthcare workers, who bear the brunt of some very unfortunate health mandates. This has led to a rise to the number of COVID-19 cases in Canada, even after restrictions has been eased (Hale et al. 2022). According to Professor Downie (1982), when the actions of a few have a substantial impact on others, particularly in the name of public health, the politics of individual responsibility should be deemed null and void. By comparison, by the end of March 2022, China had established one of the strongest coronavirus response policies in the world, with an index of 75.46 points and only 15.16 new cases per million people, one of the lowest rates in the world (Hale et al. 2022). To diminish the spread of the virus among its population, Western countries should employ China as a model for more stringent and mandatory measures.

Whenever politics of personal responsibility comes into play, government efforts will have little to no impact on reducing socioeconomic hardships endured by the collective society. Individual rights are intended to be promoted by this political thought, but strangely, it impedes the freedom of oppressed populations who are denied access to adequate healthcare and social services. Individuals who are politically motivated and believe in this doctrine should be

ashamed of themselves for politicizing what is a public health concern. Because of the politics of individualism, we need to acknowledge that individuals who are disadvantaged by socioeconomic inequities have concerns based on their own experiences and histories of victimization. Listening to their human rights concerns is instrumental to fabricate their vitalized allegiance in the government since human rights will always be fundamental rights that value justice, dignity, equality, and respect.

(1021 words)

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