



The Permanent Emergency: How the West traded liberty for the illusion of security

From pandemic lockdowns to energy rationing and digital ID laws, Western governments are quietly dismantling individual freedoms — one "temporary" emergency at a time.

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Unlike the centuries that came before it, full of great and truly important ideological and philosophical clashes, full of historical shifts in the trajectory of Western thought, values identity and culture, the story of our time will most likely not feature any grand battles of ideas or any defining crescendos that will captivate the imagination and inspire future students of history. It will be written in a dry, bureaucratic language and it simply consist of a series of "temporary" emergency

measures. This is how our remaining liberties and with them, our Western civilization, will end: “not with a bang, but with a whimper”, as T.S. Elliot would put it.

To the casual observer, the shift toward authoritarianism in the Western world feels like a series of unfortunate accidents. A pandemic here, an unnecessary war with Russia there, a geopolitical energy crisis after that. But to those who maintain a healthy skepticism of state power, a much more deliberate pattern emerges.

We are witnessing the transition from a society of individual sovereignty (or whatever was left of it) to a society of managed compliance. There is no longer even the need to manufacture consent, as we saw in the past, as the opinion of the governed simply does not factor into the equation anymore. New aggressive policies, mandates, and restrictions of all kinds are just announced one day and implemented the other, without pause to ask for consent. It is always an emergency after all, and there is no time to waste on minor concerns like the will of the people.

Breaking the psychological barrier

This blueprint was finalized during the covid era, and today, it is being applied to the energy sector and our digital identities with chilling precision. Before 2020, the idea that a Western government could unilaterally shutter small businesses, dictate who you could have in your living room, forbid you from leaving your house or mandate a medical procedure as a condition of employment was the stuff of dystopian fiction.

The covid crisis, however, massively shifted the "Overton Window" of what is permissible. It proved that if you manufacture enough fear, the public will not only accept the suspension of their basic rights but they will actually demand it. Once the principle was established that the "greater good" (as defined by the state) overrides bodily autonomy, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech, the state gained a master key to every door in our life. Surveillance was also further normalized, as tracking apps and "health passes" became the training wheels for the digital ID infrastructure we see today. As Milton Friedman noted, "there is nothing so permanent as a temporary government program."

The energy crisis: from "polite suggestions" to energy lockdowns?

As the Iran war continues to destabilize global markets, we are seeing the same covid era playbook applied to energy. What began as "polite suggestions" to lower the thermostat or work from home to "save the grid" is rapidly hardening into a regime of energy rationing.

The recent announcements out of Sweden regarding the high probability of fuel rationing are a bellwether for the rest of the West. Should this trend continue we risk crossing the Rubicon, irreversibly: When the supposedly liberal democracies of the West begins to dictate how much fuel you can purchase or how much electricity your home or business can consume, even the illusion of freedom will be lost.

The way we get there is very well mapped from the pandemic time. Governments first appeal to your "civic duty" to work from home and reduce consumption and then they incentivize compliance in practical ways, like variable pricing and "smart meters" that penalize those who don't follow the state's schedule (just like the vaccinated and the masked could work, participate in public life or go shopping during the pandemic).

Finally, states could move to implement energy lockdowns, that could involve direct rationing, rolling blackouts, and the criminalization of "excessive" energy use. These steps might sound farfetched, but they are already being implemented in various nations around the world: For a month already, Egypt for example has forced all shops, malls, restaurants and bars to close at 9pm, while countries in Asia shut down schools and universities and made work from home mandatory. By linking energy consumption to "national security" or "environmental stability," the state creates a perpetual emergency that justifies a permanent reduction in your standard of living.

While energy rationing controls our physical movement, a new wave of regulations is designed to control our digital existence too. The push for mandatory ID verification and age verification apps, exemplified by recent legislation in the EU, the United Kingdom and several US states, is the final nail in the coffin of online privacy.

The argument is always framed around "protecting the children" or "combating misinformation." However, the mechanical reality is far more invasive. It is essentially the death of anonymity, for everyone. So far the rules are just targeting certain websites, but soon enough this could be the case for internet access in general: To do anything online, you will have to present a digital passport. This will

link every search, every comment, and every transaction to your legal identity. Once an ID verification app becomes the gatekeeper to the digital world, the state (or its corporate proxies) can simply "toggle" your access on or off. You could be denied access if you fail to comply with the latest mandate. After everything we have seen in the last 5 years, it is not hard at all to imagine that governments will go to these lengths - always under the guise of "security" of course.

The ratchet effect

Power, once seized by the state, is never returned voluntarily. This is the "ratchet effect": emergencies provide the pretext for expansion, and when the crisis fades, the new powers remain.

The Western world is not falling to a sudden coup or to an invasion of a foreign army, it is dying a death of a thousand cuts, all inflicted by "reasonable" regulations and restrictions "for our own good". The only defense against this fast encroaching authoritarianism is a relentless, unapologetic skepticism of any "emergency" that requires the surrender of individual rights. If we continue to trade our liberty for the promise of security, we will eventually find ourselves with neither.

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