Atomized Rebellion and the Failure of Modern Governance: From Isolated Individuals to Collective Disorder

Kuan Hosek [a], T. Jan [a], Martha Ellison [a]

[a] *Academy of Public Policy and Economics, Hong Kong*

Abstract

This article examines atomized rebellion, a novel form of individual resistance arising from social isolation and fragmentation in modern society. Unlike traditional collective uprisings, atomized rebellion is marked by random, unpredictable acts of violence from isolated individuals, challenging conventional governance and surveillance systems. The study explores the root causes, including the "epidemic of loneliness," social alienation, and deepening economic inequality. It highlights the limitations of current control strategies and the paradoxes of a surveillance society. The paper argues for a shift towards governance focused on resocialization, community rebuilding, and enhanced mental health support. By addressing these systemic issues and restoring social cohesion, societies can mitigate the destabilizing effects of atomized rebellion and move towards a more resilient and stable social order.

Keywords: Atomized Rebellion; Social Fragmentation; Surveillance Society; Resocialization; Political Legitimacy

1. Introduction: The New Form of Rebellion in an Atomized Society

Modern society in the 21st century has entered an era of heightened information technology and surveillance. With the continuous enhancement of data analytic and state military power, governments have become adept at identifying and suppressing traditional, collective forms of rebellion. However, as social structures undergo profound transformations, a new type of rebellion has emerged: **atomized rebellion** [1]. This form of rebellion is not a conventional political uprising but rather a manifestation of random acts of violence from isolated, oppressed individuals. It is characterized by extreme individualism, unpredictability, and a high degree of destructiveness. This paper aims to delve into the underlying causes of atomized rebellion from sociological, political, and psychological perspectives, examine its potential threats to social stability, and explore future possibilities for governance.

2. The Nature of Atomized Rebellion: Individual Isolation and Social Fragmentation

The "atomization" of modern society refers to a process of structural change in which individuals become detached from traditional social ties and community structures, transforming into isolated social atoms [2]. With accelerated urbanization and the advancement of information technology, individuals' social roles have become increasingly singular. Traditional connections such as family, community, and labor unions have

weakened, and individuals have lost their collective identity. Atomized rebellion is a direct outcome of this social fragmentation and isolation, manifesting as an extreme form of individualistic resistance, devoid of traditional political demands and ideological frameworks.

2.1. The "Epidemic of Loneliness" in Modern Society

The phenomenon known as the **epidemic of loneliness** is particularly prominent in the context of atomized rebellion. As interpersonal relationships deteriorate and social trust erodes, individuals increasingly experience a sense of loneliness and alienation. This emotional state not only leads to psychological health issues but may also spark a deeper inclination toward social antagonism. When individuals recognize their isolated status and lack access to effective social support systems, they may resort to extreme measures to seek validation and influence. This pattern is frequently observed in recent instances of random violence, such as the "lone wolf" attacks seen across the United States, Europe, and Japan. These perpetrators are often socially isolated individuals whose actions stem from a profound dissatisfaction with societal indifference and alienation.

2.2. The Deeper Mechanisms of Social Atomization

One of the strategies employed in modern state governance is the tactic of **divide and rule**, which intentionally weakens the social bonds between individuals. With the expansion of capitalist economic models, the boundaries between work and personal life have blurred, reducing individuals to mere units of production and consumption [3]. Corporations, governments, and other institutions leverage social media and consumerism to entice individuals into self-expression and self-consumption. However, this self-expression does not foster meaningful social connections; rather, it results in pseudo-social interactions, reinforcing individuals' atomized state and leaving them more isolated and powerless within the social structure.

3. The Failure of Modern Governance: From Surveillance Society to Governance Dilemma

In traditional political theory, the state maintains order through the monopoly of force and control of information. Yet, the rise of atomized rebellion challenges this framework. Modern governance relies heavily on surveillance technology and large-scale data analytics to preempt and suppress organized resistance. However, when faced with atomized, random forms of rebellion, this governance model appears inadequate.

3.1. The Paradox of the Surveillance Society

The modern state increasingly depends on a surveillance society governance model, utilizing widespread CCTV cameras, social media data tracking, and big data analytics to create an omnipresent, all-encompassing system of social monitoring [4]. However, this system faces clear challenges when confronted with atomized rebellion. Surveillance society excels at detecting organized and discernible criminal or violent activities but is virtually helpless against unpredictable, motive-less acts of individual violence. An individual committing random acts of violence at a random time and place resembles the random collisions in Brownian motion, making their behavior difficult to predict and monitor. For example, in numerous knife attacks in Japan, the perpetrators often had no clear motive and no prior criminal record, rendering them undetectable by surveillance systems.

3.2. Governance Failure and the Challenge of Low-Intensity Conflict

The term low-intensity conflict traditionally refers to minor conflicts between states and non-state armed groups. However, with the rise of atomized rebellion, this concept has expanded to include the internal governance challenges faced by modern societies[5]. While the modern state possesses formidable weaponry and advanced military technology capable of easily suppressing large-scale collective uprisings, its efficiency significantly declines when dealing with dispersed atomized rebels. Each atomized rebel acts as an independent "hostile unit," whose behavior is unpredictable and whose target is unclear, diminishing the

state's advantage of military monopoly. This challenge exacerbates social instability and places the ruling authorities in a perpetual defensive posture, unable to fundamentally resolve the issue.

4. The Social and Psychological Drivers of Atomized Rebellion

The choice of individuals to engage in atomized rebellion as a form of social retaliation is rooted in complex psychological factors. This phenomenon is not merely a reaction to the isolation and fragmentation strategies of modern society but also represents a deep psychological revolt, reflecting individuals' profound dissatisfaction with their existential circumstances.

4.1. Existential Crisis and the Loss of Meaning

Existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus have long explored the notions of absurdity and nihilism in modern society. In a world bereft of collective meaning and shared beliefs, individuals' sense of existence gradually diminishes, leading them into a state of meaninglessness. Atomized rebellion can be seen as an extreme response to this existential crisis: when individuals cannot achieve social recognition or self-worth through normal means, they may resort to extreme actions to redefine their existence. The heightened atomization and fragmentation of modern society amplify this existential crisis, driving an increasing number of individuals to channel their despair into acts of social revenge.

4.2. Social Alienation and the Psychology of Revenge

The psychology of revenge plays a significant role in atomized rebellion. As social stratification becomes more rigid and economic inequality intensifies, individuals feel a growing sense of frustration and helplessness across economic, political, and social dimensions. When individuals realize that they cannot change their circumstances through legitimate means, a desire for revenge may arise [6]. Atomized rebels are not the traditional "proletariat" in the Marxist sense; they do not seek to overthrow the existing order. Instead, they use the disruption of social norms as a means to retaliate against a system they perceive as unjust. This revenge-driven mentality often involves intense emotional release, serving as a latent rebellion against the social structure and governance system [7].

5. Challenges of the Future Society and Governance Transformation

As modern society grapples with the rise of atomized rebellion, traditional governance models are increasingly showing their limitations. Neither enhanced surveillance technology nor the intensification of military suppression has proven effective in curbing this individualized, random violence. With the deepening trend of social atomization, future governance must be fundamentally rethought and restructured to address this emerging challenge.

5.1. Transitioning Governance Models: From Collective Control to Individual Guidance

In traditional governance models, the core of state power lies in regulating collective behavior to maintain social order. Through legal enforcement, propaganda, and ideological indoctrination, the state attempts to shape societal norms and behaviors. However, the rise of atomized rebellion demonstrates the inadequacy of treating society as a collective entity. Future governance needs to transition from a paradigm of "collective control" to one of "individual guidance," employing strategies that address the specific needs and psychological states of isolated individuals.

Enhancing Social Psychological Services and Crisis Intervention: One of the fundamental drivers of atomized rebellion is the heightened sense of isolation and alienation experienced by individuals. Governments should focus on establishing comprehensive mental health service systems that provide timely psychological support and crisis intervention. For instance, after the Utøya massacre, the Norwegian

government significantly bolstered its mental health services, offering proactive support to individuals at risk of becoming lone-wolf attackers, thereby preventing potential future incidents.

Rebuilding Community Structures and Social Connections: The rapid pace of urbanization has led to significant changes in social structures, eroding traditional communities and weakening social networks. Effective future governance should prioritize the reconstruction of community structures, creating public spaces and encouraging social interactions to rebuild the social fabric. In several American cities, initiatives like community policing have been implemented, where law enforcement officers work closely with residents to strengthen community trust and reduce crime rates.

5.2. Restoring Political Legitimacy and Rebuilding Social Trust

The frequent occurrence of atomized rebellion is not merely a result of shifting social structures; it also signals a crisis in political legitimacy and a breakdown of social trust. Modern states have traditionally maintained political legitimacy through economic growth and social welfare provision. However, in the context of globalization and the expansion of capitalist dynamics, increasing social inequality and unjust resource distribution have exacerbated public discontent. Individuals confronted with rigid social hierarchies feel powerless and dissatisfied, and atomized rebellion becomes a channel for expressing this discontent.

Enhancing Political Transparency and Citizen Participation: To restore political legitimacy, governments need to increase transparency in the decision-making process and expand avenues for citizen participation. Countries like Switzerland have successfully implemented participatory budgeting and referendums, allowing citizens to have a direct say in governance matters. This increased involvement has helped mitigate social conflicts and reduce the incidence of extreme behaviors.

Addressing Social Inequality through Inclusive Policies: The economist Thomas Piketty has highlighted how wealth concentration in capitalist societies leads to increasing social inequality, a major contributor to violence and social unrest. Reducing inequality and implementing inclusive policies are critical strategies for mitigating the risk of atomized rebellion. The comprehensive welfare systems in Nordic countries have successfully narrowed the income gap, enhanced overall social well-being, and served as effective examples for tackling social fragmentation.

5.3. The Dilemma of Technocratic Governance and Ethical Challenges

The modern state's reliance on information technology and surveillance tools, while bolstering crime prevention and public safety to a certain extent, also brings forth significant ethical concerns and governance dilemmas. Technocratic governance faces several critical issues when addressing atomized rebellion:

The Conflict Between Data Privacy and State Surveillance: Modern surveillance systems depend on extensive data collection and analysis, inevitably infringing upon individual privacy rights. Despite claims that surveillance is conducted in the interest of public safety, large-scale data monitoring often leads to abuses of power and generates widespread distrust towards the government. Programs like the UK's Project Echelon and the US's PRISM have sparked public outcry over privacy violations. Excessive surveillance not only fails to curb atomized rebellion effectively but may also exacerbate individual grievances, further destabilizing society.

Algorithmic Bias and Technological Failures: Modern monitoring and security systems rely heavily on algorithms and artificial intelligence. However, algorithmic bias and systemic errors can result in misjudgments and unfair enforcement actions, particularly when dealing with individualized and random acts of violence. In such cases, technocratic governance may not only fail to prevent atomized rebellion but also provoke new social conflicts. For example, the automated monitoring systems of social media platforms often struggle to detect subtle indicators of violent intent, resulting in missed warnings about extremist behavior while inadvertently censoring legitimate expressions of discontent.

6. The Impact of Atomized Rebellion on Future Society: The Metaphor of Disorder and Entropy

Atomized rebellion not only epitomizes the contemporary governance crisis but also serves as a profound metaphor for the direction of future societal development. In physics, entropy is used to describe the degree of disorder within a system. In sociology, increasing entropy signifies a process by which social systems move towards greater chaos and disintegration. As individuals become more isolated and social trust collapses, the entropy of modern society continues to rise, signifying an irreversible trend toward disorder.

6.1. The Risks of an Entropic Society: From Order to Chaos

The foundation of modern society is built upon the principles of contracts and mutual trust. When these contracts fail and trust erodes, society transitions from a state of high order to one of increasing disorder. Atomized rebels act like viruses, exploiting the vulnerabilities within social systems to disrupt them. Each instance of random violence adds to societal uncertainty and fear, undermining public confidence in the existing social contract and legal framework. Over time, this trend may lead to a state of junglefication, where the strong dominate the weak and traditional legal and social norms lose their effectiveness.

6.2. The Governance Challenge of Social Entropy

The rising trend of social entropy poses a significant challenge to traditional governance approaches. Restoring order in an increasingly entropic society is the most pressing issue facing future policymakers [8]. Potential solutions include:

Implementing Entropy-Reducing Measures: As entropy represents disorder and chaos, reducing entropy entails fostering greater social cohesion, promoting equitable distribution of resources, and mitigating social inequalities. By addressing these fundamental issues, governments can stabilize the social order and mitigate the disruptive effects of atomized rebellion.

Adopting New Governance Paradigms: Resilient and Adaptive Systems: In response to the unpredictability of atomized rebellion, modern governance must shift from "hard control" approaches to "soft regulation" frameworks. The implementation of resilient governance and adaptive systems can help society quickly recover and adjust in the face of extreme events, reducing the impact of disorder and enhancing societal resilience.

7. Consequences of Atomized Rebellion and the Reconstruction of Social Order

Atomized rebellion, as a novel form of individual resistance, has demonstrated its extreme destructive power and profound societal implications. Modern governance systems struggle to respond effectively to these unpredictable acts of random violence. These challenges are not confined merely to issues of public security but extend to crises in political legitimacy, breakdowns in social trust, and potential threats to economic stability. This section examines the possible repercussions of atomized rebellion on future society and outlines potential pathways for addressing these challenges.

7.1. Crisis of Political Legitimacy and Social Disintegration

The political legitimacy of modern states traditionally rests on pillars of stable economic growth, effective welfare systems, and public trust in the rule of law [9]. However, the increasing frequency of atomized rebellion is undermining this foundation, precipitating a political legitimacy crisis of unprecedented scale. Conventional forms of collective protest and social movements typically have clear political demands, allowing governments to respond through negotiation or reform. In contrast, atomized rebellion lacks explicit objectives, with its extreme and unpredictable actions making it difficult for governments to respond through traditional political mechanisms. This situation may lead to the following consequences:

Governance Crisis and Authoritarian Tendencies: In response to the growing number of individual acts of violence, governments may be inclined to adopt more stringent surveillance measures and employ heavy-handed tactics. This tendency can erode public trust in the authorities, exacerbating the political legitimacy crisis. In countries like the United States and China, frequent incidents of gun violence and random attacks have compelled authorities to expand surveillance and security measures. However, such actions often provoke concerns about authoritarianism, creating a vicious cycle of governance challenges.

Collapse of Social Trust and the Shrinking Public Sphere: As individual acts of violence become more prevalent, the general public's confidence in public safety diminishes. This erosion of trust leads to a contraction of the public sphere, as people become increasingly reluctant to engage in public activities for fear of becoming victims of random violence. For instance, the rise in knife attacks in major cities like London and New York has had a profound impact on public gatherings, dampening urban vibrancy and social interaction. The breakdown of social trust not only weakens societal cohesion but may also contribute to deeper social divisions.

7.2. Economic Turbulence and the Rise of Long-Tail Risks

Atomized rebellion poses a significant threat not only to social stability but also to economic systems, particularly by increasing the prevalence of long-tail risks—those rare but high-impact events that are difficult to predict yet have the potential to cause substantial damage.

Rising Costs of Law Enforcement and Economic Burden: The random and unpredictable nature of atomized rebellion forces governments to allocate increasing resources towards maintaining public safety. As individual attacks become more frequent, urban security systems face tremendous pressure. Investments in police patrols, security screening, and surveillance infrastructure lead to substantial increases in public expenditures. For example, in global cities like Paris and Tokyo, recent years have seen a significant portion of public budgets dedicated to security measures, which have not necessarily reduced the occurrence of attacks but have instead contributed to financial strain and economic stress.

Declining Investor Confidence and Capital Flight: The persistent threat of atomized rebellion can undermine investor confidence and destabilize financial markets. In regions where violence becomes a recurring concern, businesses and investors may choose to withdraw their assets or limit their exposure to such risks. South Africa offers a pertinent case study; repeated outbreaks of violent unrest and social turmoil over recent decades have resulted in substantial capital flight and stagnated economic growth. Should the trend of atomized rebellion continue to escalate, other nations may face similar economic repercussions, leading to a cycle of capital withdrawal and economic stagnation.

8. From "Atomization" to "Resocialization": Strategies for Mitigation and Social Rebuilding

Confronted with the rising threat of atomized rebellion, modern governance requires a thorough reevaluation of existing control mechanisms and regulatory frameworks. The limitations of traditional surveillance and suppression strategies have become evident, highlighting the need for governance approaches that emphasize the socialization process and mental well-being of individuals. Future efforts must focus on rebuilding social structures and promoting resocialization to address the root causes of this phenomenon.

8.1. Strengthening Mental Health Services and Psychological Support

The underlying drivers of atomized rebellion often stem from acute feelings of isolation and psychological distress. Thus, enhancing mental health services is a key strategy in mitigating this risk. Governments and civil society organizations can implement the following measures to address individual psychological needs and reduce the likelihood of extreme behavior:

Establishing a Comprehensive Mental Health Framework: Modern societies require robust mental health service systems that provide universal access to free, comprehensive psychological counseling and therapy. Singapore's Mental Health Blueprint serves as a successful model in this regard, where a national framework has significantly improved public awareness of mental health, reduced suicide rates, and mitigated the incidence of random violent acts.

Promoting Psychological First Aid Programs: Psychological first aid (PFA) is an emergency intervention designed to offer immediate support to individuals experiencing emotional breakdowns or crises. Governments can expand the reach of PFA programs within communities and schools, training volunteers and healthcare professionals to deliver rapid response interventions during mental health crises.

8.2. Social Restructuring and the Rebuilding of Collective Identity

Reconstructing social structures and reinforcing collective identity are fundamental to resolving the crisis of atomized rebellion. The future of governance must shift from a focus on "individual control" to prioritizing the enhancement of social connections and communal engagement.

Encouraging Collective Activities and Community Building: Public policies should incentivize the organization of community events, cultural festivals, and public projects that foster interaction and strengthen bonds between individuals. For instance, the French government's Citizen Participation Plan has encouraged broader public involvement in community decision-making, thereby increasing social cohesion and fostering a greater sense of collective identity.

Rebuilding Trust Mechanisms and Cooperative Networks: Strengthening social trust is a critical strategy in addressing atomized rebellion. Governments can enhance transparency in decision-making processes, combat corruption, and promote social equity to restore public faith in legal and institutional frameworks. Additionally, supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community mutual aid networks can provide individuals with increased social support and a stronger sense of belonging, reducing feelings of isolation and the risk of rebellion.

9. Conclusion: The End of Atomized Rebellion and the Dawn of a New Social Order

The emergence of atomized rebellion is a direct consequence of the transformation of modern social structures and governance models. It exposes the deep-seated issues arising from excessive control over individuals and the increasing fragmentation of society. As technological advancements continue and social divisions deepen, the trend towards individual isolation is likely to persist, making atomized rebellion a potential long-term feature of future societies, threatening both social order and economic stability.

Future governance must move beyond the traditional paradigm of "divide and control" towards a more inclusive and flexible approach focused on resocialization. By reconstructing social structures, fostering collective identity, and improving mental health services, governments and societal institutions can gradually neutralize the risks associated with atomized rebellion, shifting the trajectory from a state of increasing entropy towards one of stabilization and order.

Only when society successfully reestablishes the connections between individuals and the collective, rebuilding the foundations of trust and cooperation, will it be able to truly escape the predicament of atomized rebellion and transition towards a more stable and harmonious new era.

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