

The Impact of Covid-19 on Electoral Democracies: Global Comparison and Lessons Learnt

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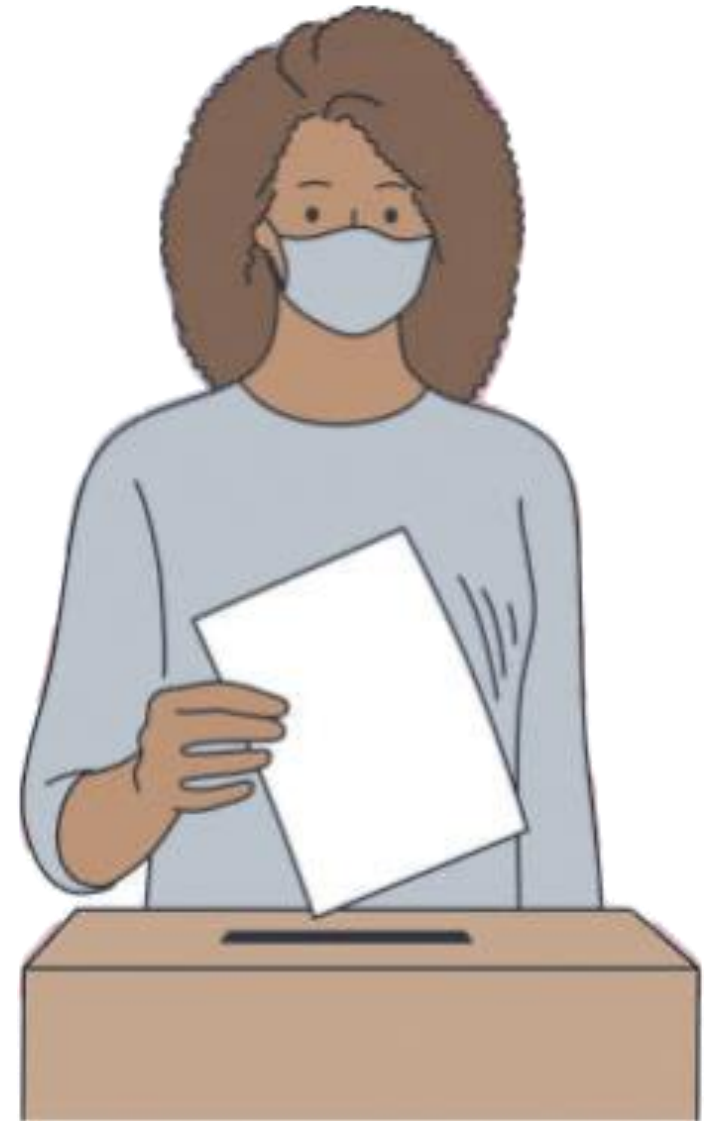
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Objectives

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on elections in general and democracies in particular

Pandemic Democracy (Landman & Di Gennaro Splendore 2020): To Postpone or Not?

Risk Management throughout the Electoral Cycle



The Postponement Paradox

(James and
Alihodzic 2020)

Level-playing field for contenders / Debates / Campaigns

Preference formation amid national emergency
(Cola, Healy & Werker 2012)

Misinformation / Authoritarian populism / Cynicism / Political
Opportunism (Tworek 2020)

Turnout dampened (James & Garnett 2020; Maizand 2020)

Boycott before elections

Violence before / after elections

Legitimacy and Trust – Effectiveness in decline amid
deepening distrust (Edelman 2021)



International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance IDEA

- At least 78 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone national and subnational elections due to COVID-19, out of which at least 41 countries and territories have decided to postpone national elections and referendums;
- At least 118 countries and territories have decided to hold national or subnational elections despite concerns related to COVID-19 of which at least 97 have held national elections or referendums;
 - At least, 53 countries and territories have held elections that were initially postponed due to concerns related to COVID-19 of which at least 28 have held national elections or referendums.
- Turnout increased in 30 countries, mean increase 7.7%
- Turnout declined in 41 countries, mean decrease 10.4%

Hong Kong Election Observation Project EOP



Tracks 129 national elections and 20 referendums held amid Covid-19 Pandemic 2020

	Cases Observed	Held as Scheduled	Postponed	Held in 2020	Pending
National Elections	129	88	40	120	9
Referendums	20	10	10	17	3
	149	98 (66%)	50 (34%)	137 (92%)	12 (8%)

Challenges to Government

In terms of the incumbents' performance, most governments have lost votes and seats.

In 15 elections (17.6%), the incumbents won more or kept the same share of seats; in 10 elections (11.8%), the incumbents won more votes than the last election.

5 of the 15 presidents seeking re-election failed to do so.

Research Questions



The extent to which Covid-19 pandemic was aggravated by elections

Factors affecting Turnout

Factors affecting Changes in Turnout

Voter Turnout



The overall turnout is 60.9%.

The turnout is higher in elections (61.3%) than referendums (58.24%).

In 85 national elections observed:

Turnout Increased in 34 cases (mean 6.1%);

Turnout Declined in 51 cases (mean 7.9%).

Average Change of Turnout -2.3%.

	Turnout Increased	Turnout Declined	Average Change
Elections Observed (85)	34	51	-2.3%
Africa	11	10	+0.26
Americas	9	14	-4.7
Asia / Central Asia / Middle East	6	11	-3.0
Europe	7	12	-0.1
Oceania	1	4	-1.9

	Turnout Increased	Turnout Declined	Average Change
Elections Observed (85)	34	51	-2.3%
Free	15	21	+0.5
Partially Free	14	15	-3.3
Not Free	5	10	-6.3
Unclassified	1	5	-3.5

	Africa	Americas	Asia Central Asia Middle East	Europe	Oceania
Countries Observed	23	20	21	21	12
Elections & Referendums Held	32	32	25	29	19
Average Turnout %	57.7	64.2	61.4	55.1	69.4
Oxford Government Response Index (1-100)	35.5	58.2	37.91	46.38	30.68
Health Expenditure % GDP 2018	5.53	6.67	6.04	7.51	9.07
14 days Covid Incidence before Election (log)	2.659	147.2419	116.0420	144.7446	0.1607
14 days Covid Incidence after Election (log)	4.312	132.9835	153.1234	230.7749	0.3785
Covid Incidence Change %	0.94	9.12	18.10	0.65	0.31
Free from Electoral Violence (-5 to +5)	-1.08	0.11	0.53	1.38	1.76
Free from Electoral Boycott (-5 to +5)	-0.86	0.86	-0.54	0.96	1.255

	Free	Partially Free	Not Free	Unclassified
Countries Observed	35	28	21	13
Elections & Referendums Held	53	39	26	19
Average Turnout %	62.6	66.4	49.9	62
Oxford Government Response Index (1-100)	44.01	43.50	37.78	58.26
Health Expenditure % GDP 2018	6.94	5.97	5.93	--
14 days Covid Incidence before Election (log)	85.3947	92.0584	33.7489	399.8847
14 days Covid Incidence after Election (log)	145.2568	127.2705	39.2959	270.4713
Covid Incidence Change %	5.4178	0.3514	15.0219	-0.2065
Free from Electoral Violence (-5 to +5)	1.066	-0.28	-0.61	--
Free from Electoral Boycott (-5 to +5)	1.024	-0.67	-1.62	--

	Model 1	Model 1 (HC3)
(constant)	1.783* (1.043)	1.783 (1.450)
Voter turnout	-2.519*** (0.465)	-2.519*** (0.746)
14 days incidence before election (log)	0.774*** (0.056)	0.774*** (0.121)
Region:		
Africa	-0.127 (0.524)	-0.127 (0.372)
Americas	1.220** (0.533)	1.220** (0.587)
Asia†	0.855 (0.552)	0.855 (0.674)
Europe	0.439 (0.524)	0.439 (0.510)
Country classification by income:		
High income	1.400** (0.652)	1.400 (0.942)
Current Health Expenditure as the % of GDP in 2018	17.725** (7.413)	17.725 (11.763)
Current Health Expenditure as the % of GDP in 2018 * High income	-19.445** (9.257)	-19.445 (14.285)
Government Response Index	-0.030*** (0.009)	-0.030** (0.015)
Freedom score	0.010* (0.005)	0.010 (0.008)
Adjusted R²	0.912	0.912
N (cases included)	68 (in 44 nations)	68

	Model 2
(constant)	0.688*** (0.040)
14 days incidence before election (log)	-0.020* (0.011)
Restriction on internal movement	-0.090* (0.053)
Region:	
<i>Asia</i> †	0.059 (0.067)
<i>Europe</i>	-0.070 (0.082)
Election violence (Free from violence)	-0.062** (0.024)
Election boycott (Free from boycott)	0.117*** (0.021)
Adjusted R²	0.411
N (cases included)	57 (in 35 nations)

	Model 3	Model 3 (HC4)
(constant)	-0.014 (0.022)	-0.014 (0.026)
14 days incidence before election (log)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.007)
Election violence (Free form violence)	-0.057*** (0.013)	-0.057*** (0.020)
Election boycott (Free from boycott)	0.047*** (0.012)	0.047 (0.029)
Restriction on internal movement	-0.059** (0.029)	-0.059* (0.030)
Asia†	0.034 (0.036)	0.034 (0.057)
Europe	0.088* (0.044)	0.088 (0.056)
Adjusted R²	0.344	0.344
N (cases included)	49 (in 35 nations)	49

Democratic backsliding, strengthening authoritarian and hybrid regimes (Arceneaux et al 2020; Asplund & James 2020; Freedom House 2020; IDEA 2020; James and Asplund 2020; Lydall 2020)

Nearly half of democracies have regressed on basic rights with emergency measures to combat Covid-19

- State-led oppression against democracy movements
 - Abuse of executive powers
 - Changing the rules of the game
 - Obstruction / disruption of electoral observation missions
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	Global	Regime Type			Region				
		Free	Partially Free	Not Free	Africa	Americas	Asia Central Asia Middle East	Europe	Oceania
FS 2020	60.2	87.20	56.49	19.72	40.22	69.59	46.79	79.38	88.60
FS 2021	59.6	87.46	56.12	17.44	38.81	70.68	45.24	79.08	89.00
Change	-0.58	0.26	-0.37	-2.28	-1.41	1.09	-1.55	-0.30	0.4

Elections can be credible and proceed with integrity

(Birch et al 2020; Krimmer et al 2020)

- **WHAT** Government does and **HOW** the stakeholders respond may mitigate the adverse effects with respect to the spread of Covid, the turnout, and electoral violence
 - Special Voting Arrangements (SVAs) to ensure inclusive participation
 - Adjustments to Traditional Methods of In-person Voting: Health & Safety Measures
 - Capacity-building: Planning, Training and Resources
 - Public education and communication
 - Consensus-building



No Quick Fix



Organizational Elephant Traps (James 2021)

Political Risks:

- Leadership deficits
 - Coordination deficits
 - Implementation deficits
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Electoral Observation and Audits

Thank you!

