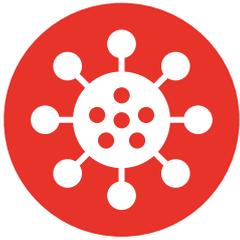




The Global State of Democracy IN FOCUS

Special Brief, December 2020



Taking Stock of Global Democratic Trends Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Key facts and findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic has swept through a world that was in many ways ailing democratically, with more countries experiencing democratic erosion, backsliding—aided by the rise of populist parties in government—and deepening autocratization than at any time since the third wave of democratization in the 1970s.
- Despite these challenges—or perhaps because of them—democratic aspirations have remained strong. Spurred by citizen demands, the number of democracies has continued to grow even in the last decade—albeit at a slower speed than during the 1990s. And, in recent years, citizens across the world have been protesting for more and better democracy.
- The COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to some of the processes of democratic reform observed before the pandemic, while entrenching or accelerating processes of democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization. It has engendered a global public health crisis, but also an economic, social and democratic crisis of unparalleled proportions.
- To address the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, more than half the countries in the world (59 per cent) had declared a national state of emergency (SoE), enabling them to take drastic temporary (and in most cases necessary) measures to fight the pandemic. These measures have included in most cases temporarily curbing basic civil liberties, such as freedom of assembly and movement, and in some cases postponing elections.
- While most democratic restrictions imposed during the pandemic were implemented within constitutionally defined SoEs—half (50 per cent) of which have now been lifted—the pandemic has presented a number of challenges for democracy.
- International IDEA's [Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights](#) (2020a) finds that more than half the countries in the world (61 per cent) had, by the end of November 2020, implemented measures to curb COVID-19 that were concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective. These violated democratic standards because they were either disproportionate, illegal, indefinite or unnecessary in relation to the health threat (the methodology to determine this is explained in the [Global Monitor Methodology and Codebook](#) (International IDEA n.d.)).
- Concerning developments have been more common in countries that were already non-democratic prior to the pandemic (90 per cent) and less common, although still quite widespread, in democracies (43 per cent).
- The democracies that have implemented democratically concerning measures are those that were already ailing before the pandemic. More than two-thirds were democracies that were either backsliding, eroding or weak prior to the pandemic.
- Almost a year since the first outbreak of COVID-19, the pandemic seems to have deepened autocratization in most of the countries that were already non-democratic. However, in at least 3 of those countries (Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand), the

pandemic has also tapped into existing simmering citizen discontent and may have been the tipping point in unleashing massive protest waves demanding democratic reform. The pandemic has also seemingly deepened democratic backsliding processes and exposed the democratic weakness and fragility of new or re-transitioned democracies (Malaysia, Mali, Myanmar, Sri Lanka). In a few cases, the pandemic has also exposed countries that showed no apparent sign of democratically ailing prior to the pandemic, but where concerning democratic developments have occurred during the pandemic and which risk seeing a significant deterioration in their democratic quality as a result (i.e. Argentina, El Salvador).

- Moreover, examples of democratic risks related to some COVID-19 SoEs include: the lack of adequate parliamentary scrutiny in their approval or subsequent extensions, as well as in the oversight of their implementation; the concentration of power in the executive without proper checks and balances; the inclusion of measures that are not strictly necessary to curb the pandemic (particularly in relation to curbing disinformation on the virus or excessive use of force in enforcing restrictions); and extension of SoEs beyond the time strictly necessary to control the pandemic.
- The aspects of democracy that have seen the most concerning developments during the pandemic are freedom of expression, media integrity, and personal integrity and security. However, the freedoms that have been restricted across most

countries are freedom of movement and assembly. Another core democratic process that has been heavily affected by the pandemic is the electoral, with half the elections scheduled between February and December 2020 postponed due to the pandemic.

- The pandemic has, however, also shown democracy’s resilience and capacity for renovation. Innovation through accelerated digitalization has occurred across most regions of the world. And democratic institutions, such as parliaments, courts, electoral commissions, political parties, media and civil society actors, have fought back against attempts at executive overreach and democratic trampling or collaborated to ensure effective responses to the pandemic. Moreover, a few countries stand out as examples to learn from, succeeding in keeping COVID-19 fatality rates low while also generally adhering to democratic principles. The high-performing democracies of Iceland, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Taiwan and Uruguay stand out in this regard, as do the mid-range democracies of Cyprus, Japan, Senegal and Sierra Leone.
- Strengthening, reinvigorating and protecting democratic institutions in tackling the new phases of the pandemic and in the economic recovery efforts after the pandemic will be key, as healthy and strong democracies will be better able to guarantee an inclusive, more equitable and accountable recovery in the post-COVID-19 ‘new normal’.

FIGURE 1
The global state of democracy during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept through a world that was in many ways ailing democratically, with more countries experiencing democratic erosion, backsliding—aided by the rise of populist parties in government—and deepening autocratization than at any time since the third wave of democratization in the 1970s. Prior to the pandemic, civic space was also shrinking across all regions of the world and press freedom was under attack in many countries, including in regions with a concentration of older and consolidated democracies such as Europe.

Despite these challenges—or perhaps because of them—democratic aspirations had nevertheless continued to grow, even in hybrid or authoritarian contexts, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. In 2019, popular uprisings had just toppled the authoritarian government in Sudan and sparked an ongoing transition process. In the Gambia in 2017, long-time ruler President Yahya Jammeh was ousted from power through electoral defeat. The enduring hybrid regimes of Armenia and Malaysia had in 2018 transitioned towards democracy for the first time in their history. Ethiopia had started a democratic reform process, moving the country from an authoritarian to a hybrid regime, with the first democratic elections planned for 2020. Hybrid regimes such as those in Algeria and Russia, as well as the authoritarian regime of Iran, had witnessed mass protests throughout 2019. Moreover, in many democracies across all performance levels, protests took hold in the second half of 2019, demanding better democracy and better delivery of democracy, including more equitable development, less corruption and more assertive action on climate change. This protest wave has raised fundamental questions about the sustainability of the socio-economic model dominating the pre-pandemic world and highlighted the need for more equitable, inclusive, accountable and sustainable socio-economic development paths.

It is in this global context that the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, putting a halt to some democratization processes, while entrenching other backsliding processes, causing a global public health crisis, but also an economic, social and democratic crisis of unparalleled proportions. The pandemic will most likely aggravate some of the democratic ills observed before the crisis, with

About this *GSoD In Focus*

This *GSoD In Focus* provides a brief overview of the global state of democracy at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, and assesses some of the preliminary impacts that the pandemic has had on democracy globally in 2020. This overview is part of a series of 5 *GSoD In Focus* that provides this analysis globally and for several regions of the world (Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean). It serves as an interim analysis in the gap year of International IDEA's *Global State of Democracy Report*, which is published biennially, with the next issue scheduled for the end of 2021.

The pre-pandemic democracy assessment is based on the GSoD Indices with data from 2019 (see section 2). The GSoD Indices are built around a [conceptual framework](#) of democracy developed by International IDEA and which centres on 5 core attributes considered essential for healthy democracies: (1) Representative Government; (2) Fundamental Rights; (3) Checks on Government; (4) Impartial Administration; and (5) Participatory Engagement. The GSoD Indices 2019 offer a valuable baseline for understanding the pre-pandemic democratic context. However, given the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses by governments to contain the spread of the coronavirus, it is likely that the democratic status of some countries in the region will have changed as a result of more recent developments. Such changes will not be reflected in the GSoD Indices until the next update in 2021.

The review of the state of democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (section 3) is organized along these 5 attributes of democracy, and uses qualitative analysis and data of events and trends in the region collected through International IDEA's [Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights](#), an initiative co-funded by the European Union. The Global Monitor is a digital platform that tracks the democracy and human rights impacts of measures implemented to curb COVID-19 across 162 countries in the world. The Global Monitor is based on a [methodology](#) developed by International IDEA, and uses secondary sources and information from other trackers (International IDEA n.d.). While the data in this brief reflects the global situation in November 2020, for monthly updated information and data, visit the [COVID-19 Global Monitor summary](#).

democracies and non-democracies alike facing economic hardship and massive unemployment, further deepening societal malaise. However, the pandemic has also forced innovation and reforms in the way democratic institutions conduct their work and engage with voters. And political leaders, democratically elected or not, are facing harsh citizen scrutiny of their handling of the pandemic and of the ensuing economic crisis, potentially paving the way for political change and democratic openings both in democracies (United States) and in the most repressive of authoritarian regimes, as can be seen in Belarus or Thailand.

The next section of this *GSoD In Focus* will seek to provide an overview of the global state of democracy by the end of 2019, just before the pandemic broke out, based on data from the GSoD Indices 2019.

It will also seek to ‘take the pulse’ of democracy during the pandemic, analysing some of the democratic trends observed and the likely effect of COVID-19-curbing measures on democracy 10 months into the pandemic. The 2020 data is drawn from the [COVID-19 Global Monitor of Democracy and Human Rights](#) (International IDEA 2020a). The pandemic analysis focuses on the key challenges to and opportunities for democracy observed during the pandemic. Some of these impacts directly relate to measures implemented to curb the pandemic. However, some developments may not be directly attributable to the measures but may have been exacerbated or deepened by the situation posed by the pandemic. Others simply relate to domestic political processes taking place in countries. The analysis will seek to disentangle and unpack these in a succinct overview geared towards policymakers, civil society organizations and other democracy stakeholders.

The events and country cases mentioned throughout the brief are illustrative and are not intended to be exhaustive. Likewise, given the fluidity of the situation since January 2020 and the rapid pace of change, some of the events mentioned here may yet have changed by the time of publication. However, they are still valuable to show the evolving nature of the pandemic response and their preliminary impact on democracy during this historical time.

This brief is a preliminary reflection offered by International IDEA as input into the debate on the impact of COVID-19 on democracy globally, 10 months into the pandemic. While identifying potential new avenues of research and pinpointing some key issues for policymaking, it also offers international, regional and national policymakers and civil society organizations (the main target audience for this review) an open invitation to provide their own suggestions and ways in which these can best be addressed, to enrich the understanding of the multiple ongoing democratic transformations in the region under this unprecedented time in history. These external inputs will feed into the forthcoming *Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Report*, planned for release in 2021.

2. The global democratic landscape prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Global pre-pandemic democratic landscape based on the GSoD Indices



- Despite the continued expansion of democracy worldwide over the past 4 decades, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, democracies were facing a crisis of quality, and democratic performance varied widely between countries and regions.** In 2019, the large majority of democracies (61 per cent) performed in the mid-range, while the share of democracies that were weak (22 per cent) was higher than the share of democracies that were high performing (16 per cent, down from 24 per cent in 2000). Some regions, such as Africa and the Middle East, have no high-performing democracies. Africa also hosts the largest share of weak and fragile democracies.
- The decline in the quality of democracy was also seen in the doubling of the number of democracies experiencing democratic erosion in the last 10 years compared with the decade before (Figure 2).** The GSoD Indices define democratic erosion as a statistically significant decline on at least 1 democratic subattribute over a 5-year period in democracies. Democratic erosion can occur at different levels of democratic development. In 2019, more than half (52 per cent) of the world's democracies experienced democratic erosion of some form and with different levels of severity. Nearly half the world's population (44 per cent) live in countries that have experienced some form of democratic erosion in the last 5 years. In total, 16 democracies suffered severe democratic erosion between 2015 and 2019, with declines on 3 or more aspects of democracy, with Brazil, the Philippines, Poland and the United States as the 4 countries in the world with the greatest declines.
- Democratic backsliding, which International IDEA defines as a particularly severe form of democratic erosion involving the gradual and intentional weakening of checks and balances and curtailment of civil liberties, has also become more frequent in the last decade (International IDEA 2019).** Countries that were backsliding democratically when the pandemic broke out are Brazil, Hungary, India, the Philippines, Poland and Serbia. In Nicaragua (2016), Pakistan (2018) and Turkey (2018), the backsliding was so severe that it led to a regression into hybridity (partial democratic breakdown). Venezuela represents the most severe democratic backsliding case in the past 4 decades, becoming an authoritarian regime in 2017.
- Low levels of popular support for democracy, as well as societal and political polarization, and populist presidents and governments, increase the probability of democratic backsliding.** Democratic backsliding also appears to be a political reaction to economic vulnerabilities exposed in the wake of international economic integration and the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 (International IDEA 2019).
- Although the number of authoritarian regimes has more than halved since 1975, and these now represent only 20 per cent of all countries, more than 2.1 billion people live under such regimes (28 per cent of the world's population).** In most authoritarian regimes, civil liberties tend to be systematically curtailed and there is often no clear separation of power. The judiciary is usually controlled by the executive, oppositional political parties are often barred from operating freely, and the media tends to be systematically restricted, as are critical voices within civil society.
- The number of hybrid regimes has more than doubled since 1990, from 13 to 30 countries, spread out across all regions, although Africa holds the largest share.** Hybrid regimes often adopt democratic façades (in the form of periodic, albeit non-competitive, elections), generally coupled with severe restrictions on civil liberties and other democratic rights. More than half the world's hybrid regimes (56 per cent) can be found in Africa. Democracies that have recently regressed to hybridity include Nicaragua and Zambia in 2016, Pakistan and Turkey in 2018 and Bolivia in 2019. However, in October 2020, democratic elections put Bolivia back on a democratic path.
- Authoritarian and hybrid regimes together represent more than one third (39 per cent) of countries in the world. There are 3.4 billion people, or 45 per cent of the world's population, living under such regimes.**
- The world has experienced autocratization in the past 5 years.** Twice as many countries have moved away from democracy than have moved towards democracy since 2016. Moreover, an increasing number of hybrid and authoritarian countries have become more repressive in the last decade, and this tendency has more than doubled from the decade before (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2

Percentage of eroding democracies 1980–2019

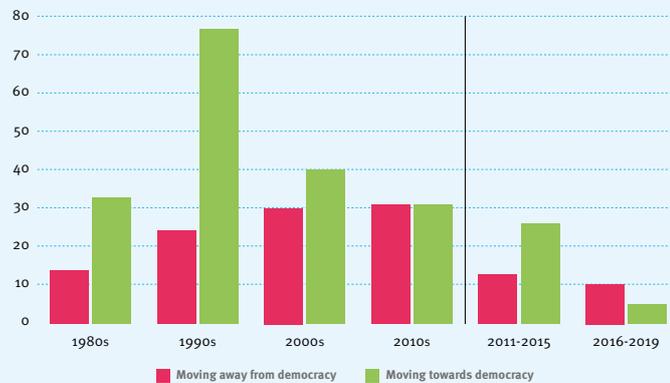


Source: International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019*, 2020b, accessed 30 October 2020.

Notes: This graph shows the percentage of democracies with at least 1 democratic subattribute decline in the preceding 5 years from 1980 to 2019.

FIGURE 3

Number of countries moving away from or towards democracy, 1980–2019



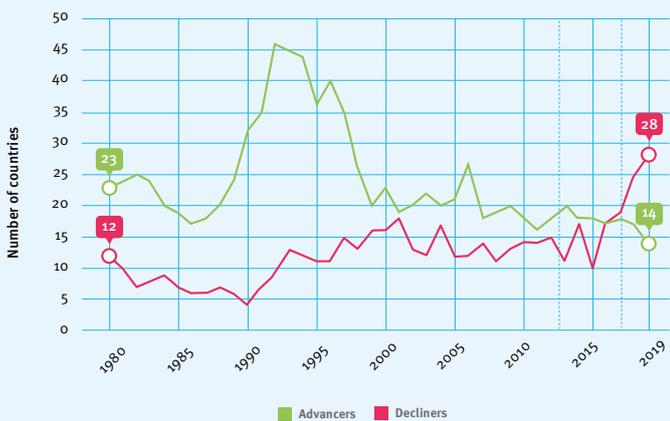
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 30 October 2020.

Notes: Green bars represent the number of countries moving towards democracy, either transitioning from hybrid or authoritarian to democracy or moving from authoritarian to hybrid since 1980, by decade. Red bars are the number of countries moving away from democracy, moving either from democracy to hybrid or authoritarian or from hybrid to authoritarian. The last 2 bars disaggregate these movements during the periods 2011–2015 and 2016–2019.

- **Declines in electoral integrity.** Despite electoral gains over the past decades, since 2015 the number of countries with significant declines in Clean Elections has grown, reaching the highest peak ever in 2019 (see Figure 4). Immediately prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, a total of 28 countries had seen significant declines in electoral integrity over the past 5 years.

FIGURE 4

Countries with 5-year significant advances and declines in Clean Elections, 1980–2019



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 30 October 2020.

- **Civil liberties were under strain prior to the pandemic.** From 2015 to 2019, the aspect of democracy that experienced the most declines

globally was Civil Liberties. A total of 35 countries saw significant declines in this area since 2013. Most affected was Freedom of Expression (35 countries), followed by Freedom of Association and Assembly (28 countries) and Freedom of Movement (22 countries). Declines in Civil Liberties occurred in countries experiencing democratic erosion (Chile, Costa Rica, United States), democratic backsliding (Brazil, India, the Philippines, Turkey), democratic breakdown (Bolivia) and deepening autocratization (Cambodia, Nicaragua, Venezuela).

- **Freedom of Expression and Media Integrity were under severe threat the world over prior to the pandemic.** Freedom of Expression has declined globally since 2014, with more countries declining than advancing for the first time since 1975. From 2015 to 2019, as many as 35 countries experienced declines in Freedom of Expression and 26 countries in Media Integrity (see Figure 5). The trend was seen across all regions and levels of democratic performance. The Americas (North America and Latin America and the Caribbean), however, is the region with the largest share of countries experiencing decreases in Freedom of Expression, followed by Asia and Europe, and Africa and the Middle East.

FIGURE 5

Countries with 5-year significant advances and declines in Freedom of Expression, 1980–2019



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 30 October 2020.

- **The declines in Civil Liberties prior to the pandemic were part of a global trend of shrinking civic space, where the space for civil society and a free media to express their opinions and hold governments to account was gradually eroding.** This is concerning, as a vibrant civic space is key to building and sustaining a healthy democracy and safeguarding it against threats. Declines in Civil Liberties occurred in contexts of democratic erosion (Chile, Costa Rica, United States), democratic backsliding (Brazil, India, the Philippines, Turkey), democratic breakdown (Bolivia) and deepening autocratization (Cambodia, Nicaragua, Venezuela).
- **In the past 4 decades, the slowest gains have been made in Gender Equality, Social Group Equality in access to political power, Judicial Independence, and Absence of Corruption.**

Opportunities for democracy

- **When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe in early 2020, the majority of the countries in the world had democratic forms of government, elected through minimally competitive elections.** More than half the countries in the world (61 per cent, or 99 countries) were democratic in 2019, and more than half (55 per cent) of the world’s population lived in a democracy. This followed a global democratic expansion that started in the 1970s, peaking in the period from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s (see Figure 6).
- **In the 10 years prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, the number of democracies in the world continued to grow, from 93 in 2009 to 99 in 2019.** New or recently re-transitioned democracies in the last 5 years prior to the pandemic include Myanmar and Sri Lanka in 2015, the Gambia in 2017, and Armenia and Malaysia in 2018. These new democracies testify to the strong democratic aspirations that still exist throughout the world, expressed through popular uprisings against enduring hybrid or authoritarian regimes, or through the ballot box.

FIGURE 6

Global trends in regime types, 1975–2019



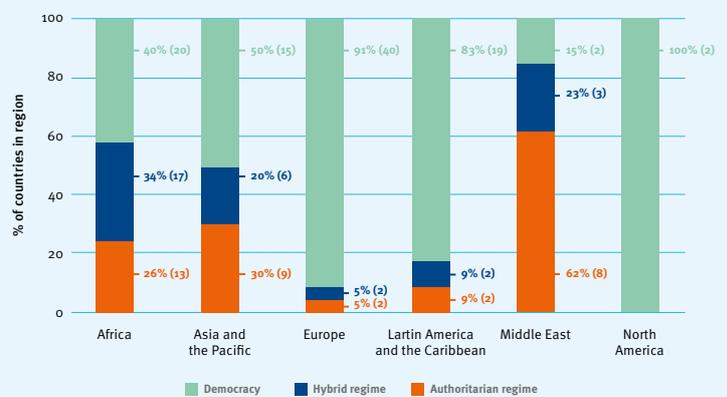
Source: International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b*, accessed 30 October 2020.

- **By the end of 2019, all regions¹ in the world contained democracies, although some regions were more democratic than others.** The more democratic regions in the world were Europe (91 per cent of countries were democracies) and Latin America and the Caribbean (83 per cent), together with North America. The picture is bleaker in Africa, and in Asia and the Pacific, where only 40 per cent and 50 per cent of countries are democracies, respectively. Of the 35 democracies found in both

regions combined (Africa, and Asia and the Pacific), only 3 are high performers—Australia, New Zealand and South Korea—and no high-performing democracy is found in Africa. The Middle East remains the least democratic region, with only 2 (weak) democracies—Iraq and Lebanon—in a profoundly authoritarian region. Figure 7 provides a detailed breakdown of the different regime types per region.

FIGURE 7

Regime types by region, 2019



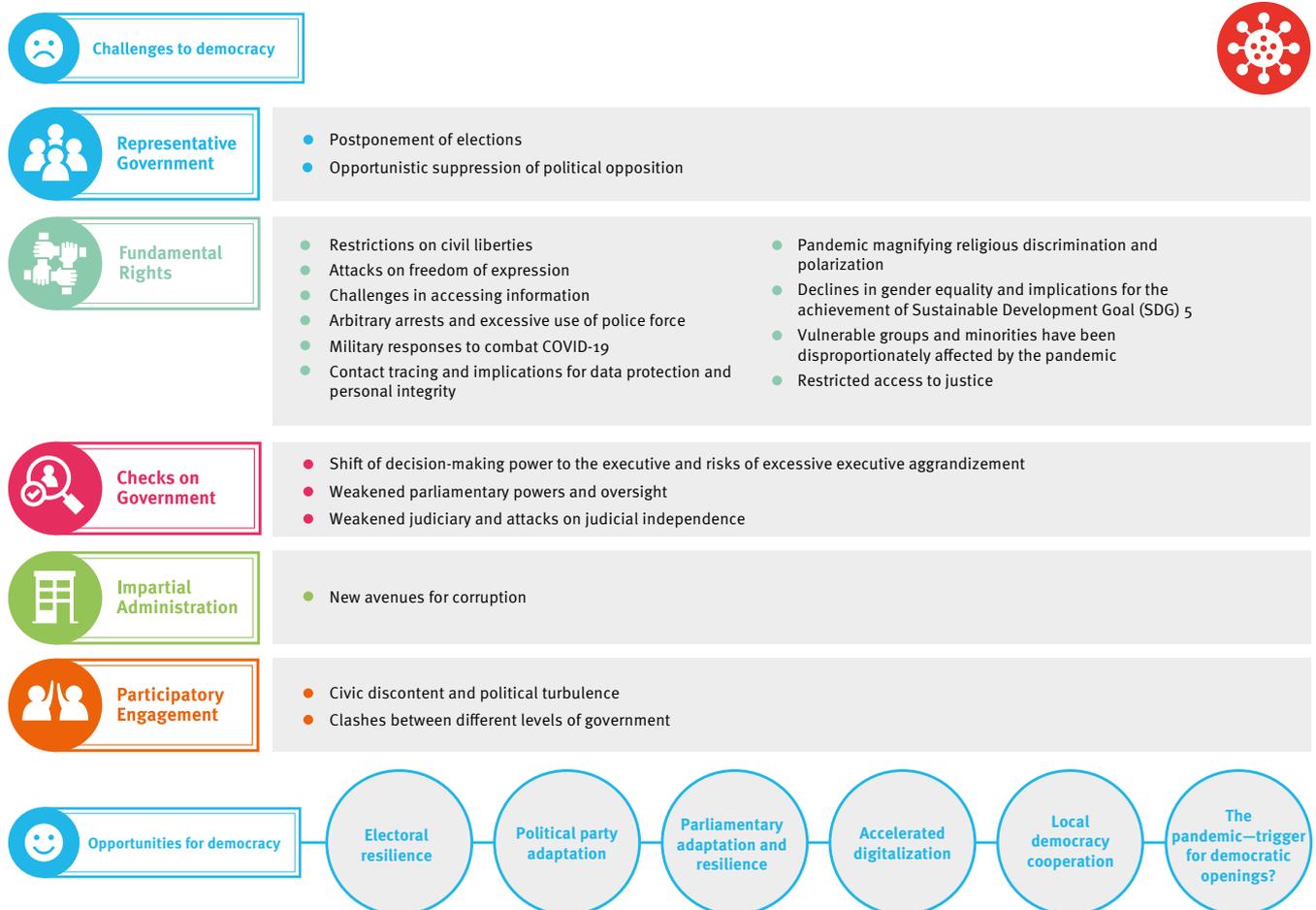
Source: International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b*, accessed 30 October 2020.

- **Despite the challenges to democracy, demands for democratization continue to appear in authoritarian and hybrid regimes.** In 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, popular uprisings had just toppled the authoritarian government of President al-Bashir in Sudan, leading to a transition government and elections scheduled for 2022. A democratic reform process was initiated in Ethiopia, with elections scheduled for 2020. Uzbekistan launched a reform process, which turned the country from an enduring authoritarian regime into a hybrid regime in 2019. And hybrid regimes such as Algeria and Russia, as well as the authoritarian regime of Iran, witnessed mass protests throughout 2019.
- **Moreover, demands for better democracy were strong prior to the outbreak of the pandemic.** Protests took hold in the second half of 2019 in democracies across all performance ranges, such as Chile, Colombia, Iraq, Lebanon and the United States. The protests were focused on a wide range of demands, ranging from better democracy, more equitable development and action to combat racial discrimination, to firmer action on climate change and combating corruption.

3. Democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and opportunities

FIGURE 8

Global democracy and COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities



BOX 1

States of emergency and democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic

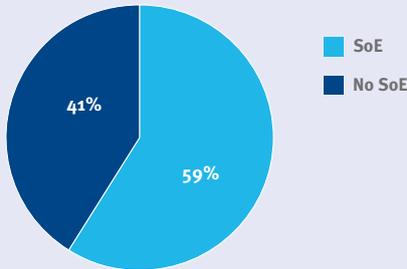
Most of the world’s democratic constitutions include emergency provisions that allow authorities, in times of urgent necessity (such as war, natural disasters or pandemics), to take swift and necessary actions to address the crisis—in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, to safeguard public health. States of emergency (SoEs)² usually provide for some form of political and legal accountability mechanisms, including institutional, procedural, substantive and temporal regulations. When declared, they set aside some of the normal institutional checks and balances in order to concentrate decision-making power in the executive. In some cases, this includes the power to delay elections. In nearly all cases, SoEs also permit limiting or suspending some civil liberties and rights. The scope of such restrictions, as well as the definition of non-derogable rights, may also be prescribed in the constitution, although not always. ‘If they are well designed and properly applied, emergency provisions are a self-defence mechanism for democracy—a way of ensuring democratic resilience by providing the power needed to deal with serious threats and challenges within the framework of a democratic constitution. If a constitution did not contain such emergency provisions, the state would

have to either: (a) stand with its hands tied, unable to undertake urgent actions necessary to deal with the emergency or (b) exercise such powers outside the law. Either of these outcomes could be very dangerous for democracy’ (International IDEA 2018).

To address the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, more than half the countries in the world (59 per cent) had declared a national ‘state of emergency’, or similar, enabling them to take drastic measures to fight the pandemic (Figure 9). There is no uniformity in the name and scope of SoEs across the world and there is also great diversity in terms of the motives and procedures to declare them, the formalities they entail, and the official organs authorized to declare, execute and even review them (Fix-Zamudio 2004: 858). Measures imposed as part of SoEs have included temporarily curbing basic civil liberties, such as freedom of assembly and movement, and in some cases, postponing elections. What was initially perceived as a mere public health issue spilled over into the political realm, affecting core democratic processes, which in many countries had been taken for granted for decades.

FIGURE 9

Percentage of countries with/without SoE during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

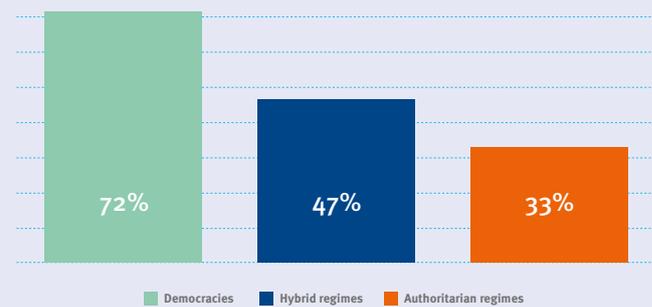
National SoEs have been more common in democracies. Well over two thirds (72 per cent) of all democracies declared national SoEs to fight the pandemic, compared with 47 per cent of hybrid regimes and 33 per cent of authoritarian regimes (see Figure 10). Indeed, democracies can only impose restrictions on civil liberties (such as freedom of movement and assembly) in the context of a constitutionally allowed SoE. According to democratic good practice, SoEs should—among other procedural and substantive safeguards—be adopted through a parliamentary vote and should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and oversight (INTER PARES 2020).

Making sure that SoEs are time-bound and temporary is also key, to ensure that the powers conferred by an SoE are only used to address the urgent need and that constitutional normality is restored as soon as possible (International IDEA 2018). The Global Monitor data shows that the majority of countries (73 per cent) that declared a national SoE followed international good practice and specified a timeframe. The average length of the initial SoEs declared was 62 days, although this includes 6 countries (all democracies except Ethiopia) with exceptionally long COVID-19-related SoEs (longer than 100 days), with Argentina and Sierra Leone topping the list. However, in September 2020, the Philippines, by extending its ‘state of calamity’ by a year, became the country with the longest COVID-19 SoE (1 year and 6 months). By November 2020, in total, 67 countries (69 per cent) had renewed their SoE at least once.

Authoritarian regimes not only were less likely than democracies to declare SoEs, but when they did, they were less likely to indicate an end date for the SoE. Almost half of authoritarian regimes (46 per cent) did not specify an end date for their SoE, compared with only 25 per cent of democracies.

FIGURE 10

SoE by regime type



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

By the end of November 2020, half the COVID-19-related SoEs (50 per cent) had been lifted. However, 7 countries had by then reinstated SoEs in response to a rise in infections and fears about a second wave: the Dominican Republic in July 2020; Timor-Leste and the Gambia in August 2020; and Czechia, France, Slovakia and Spain in October 2020. In mid-October, Thailand also imposed an SoE for Bangkok, although not in response to rising infections, but to contain the protest wave shaking the capital.

Some democratic challenges have been linked to SoEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples include: the lack of adequate parliamentary involvement or debate in the approval, or extension, of SoEs; the concentration of power in the executive without proper parliamentary and public oversight; and the inclusion of measures that are not strictly necessary to curb the pandemic, particularly in relation to curbing disinformation on the virus and SoE extensions for longer than necessary to control the pandemic.

FIGURE 11

Countries with longest SoEs approved during the pandemic, by number of days



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 31 October 2020.

 Challenges to democracy

3.1. Challenges to democracy

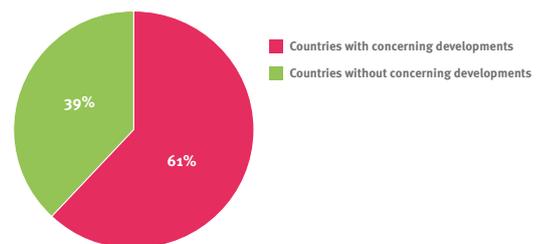
Democracy has been one of the many victims of the pandemic. Indeed, more than half the countries in the world have implemented measures to contain the pandemic that present concerns from a democracy and human rights perspective. By November 2020, more than half the countries in the world (99 out of 162 countries, or 61 per cent of countries covered in the Global Monitor (International IDEA 2020a)) had implemented measures that present concerns from a democracy and human rights perspective, because they were either disproportionate, illegal, indefinite or unnecessary. ‘Concerning’ developments or measures are defined as those that *violate* human rights or democratic benchmarks because they are either disproportionate, unnecessary, illegal or indefinite. Developments or measures that are ‘potentially concerning’ or ‘to watch’,³ on the other hand, *may lead to such violations* if enforced or maintained over time (for the full methodology, see [International IDEA n.d.](#)).

China is among the 4 countries in the world—alongside Bangladesh, Cuba and India—with most measures to curb the pandemic that present concerns from a democracy and human rights perspective

Measures or developments of concern for democracy and human rights have been more common in non-democratic regimes than in democracies. Such developments occurred in 90 per cent of non-democratic regimes, compared with 43 per cent of democracies. Non-democratic regimes had, on average, twice as many concerning developments as democracies. All the hybrid and authoritarian regimes that have implemented measures of concern during the pandemic either had suffered democratic declines during the 5 years prior to the pandemic or were already scoring in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on at least 2 of their democratic aspects in 2019 prior to the pandemic. China and Cuba, both enduring authoritarian regimes, are often cited as success cases in fighting the pandemic, as they were among the 37 countries with the lowest fatality rates in the world in October 2020 (Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center 2020). However, their apparent success in fighting the virus has been achieved at a high democracy and human rights cost. Both are among the 4 countries in the world that have implemented the most concerning measures—from a democracy and human rights perspective—to curb COVID-19. Examples of measures that are concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective are provided in Box 2.

FIGURE 12

Percentage of countries with concerning democracy developments



Source: International IDEA, ‘Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections’ [multimedia report], 18 March 2020e, accessed 20 October 2020.

BOX 2

Concerning COVID-19-related measures

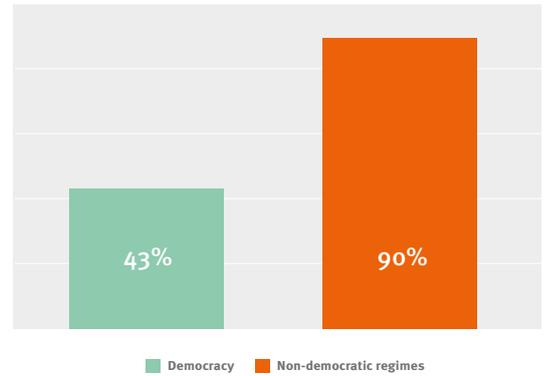
Examples of concerning COVID-19-related measures from a democracy and human rights perspective in some authoritarian regimes:

- Imposing strict restrictions, without a clear constitutional or legal basis, such as an SoE
- Lockdowns imposed without legal backing or lack of details on duration or exact extent of the restrictions
- Cover-up of outbreaks of COVID-19 and COVID-19 statistics not released to the public or journalists
- Harassment and censorship against scientists and hospital staff speaking out about the virus
- Arbitrary detention, disappearance and expulsion of journalists reporting on the virus
- Research on COVID-19 must obtain approval prior to publishing, preventing scientific information sharing on the virus
- Compulsory contact tracing app with personal data and testing data shared with police, which could be used for other purposes than controlling the pandemic
- Forceful quarantine of people with suspected infections
- People coerced into taking untested medicine against COVID-19

While the majority (57 per cent) of democracies have implemented measures that do not harm democratic principles, more than 2 out of 5 democracies implemented measures that can be viewed as concerning (Figure 13). While it is not surprising that authoritarian and hybrid regimes are more likely than democracies to severely curtail basic freedoms and democratic rights—with or without a pandemic—the fact that more than 2 out of 5 democracies had at least 1 concerning development (where COVID-19-curbing measures have been disproportionate, unnecessary or illegal) is reason for worry. However, most of the democracies that have experienced concerning developments are those that were already ailing before the pandemic—the majority were either backsliding, eroding or weak. The democracies appearing in the top 15 countries in the world with the most concerning developments are: India (severely backsliding democracy); Iraq (very weak democracy); Malaysia (new democracy in 2018 with recent challenges); Myanmar (weak democracy); and Sri Lanka (newly re-transitioned democracy) (see Figure 15). The V-Dem Pandemic Backsliding Index reaches similar conclusions in its analysis (V-Dem 2020).

FIGURE 13

Share of democracies and non-democratic regimes with concerning developments during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

FIGURE 14

Average number of concerning democracy developments by regime type during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

FIGURE 15

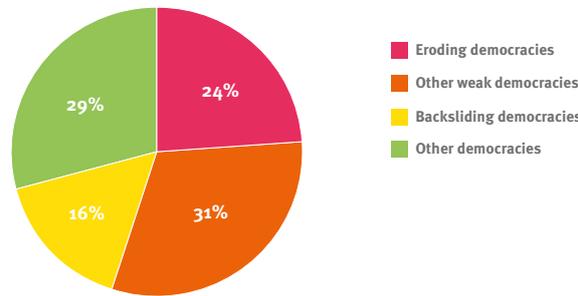
Democracies with the greatest number of concerning democracy developments during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

FIGURE 16

Types of democracies with concerning democracy developments



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

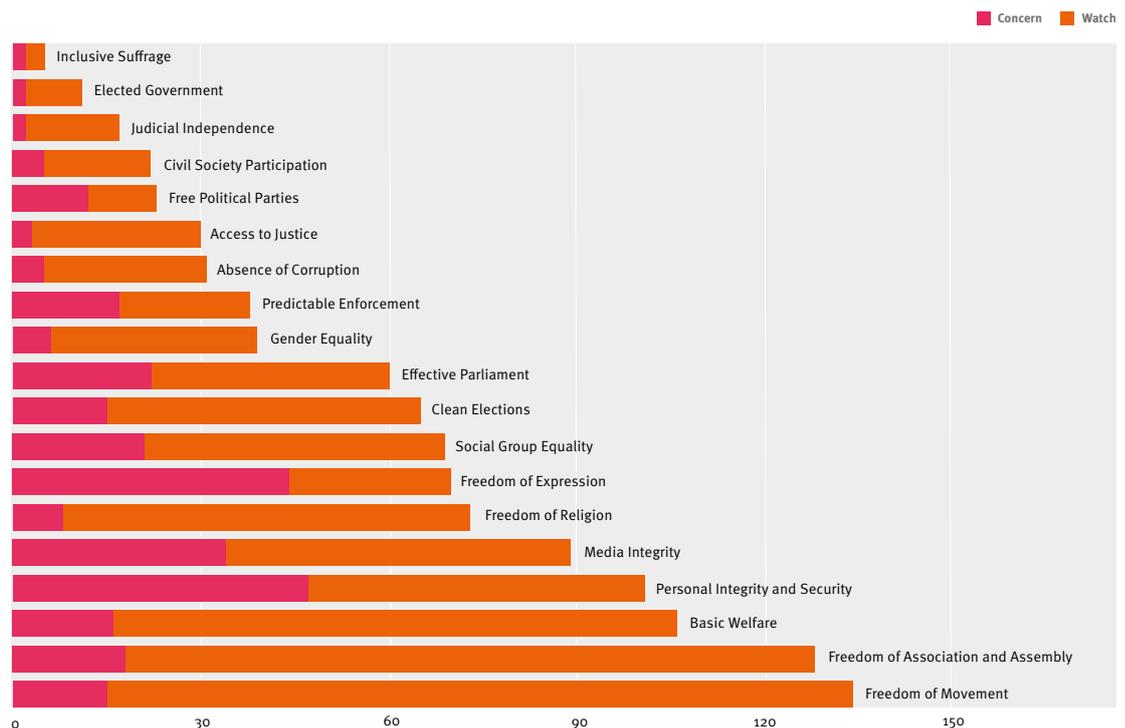
Notes: The GSoD Indices define weak democracies as those democracies that have at least 1 democratic attribute with low performance (below 0.4 out of 1). Eroding democracies are those democracies that have had at least 1 statistically significant decline in the past 5 years. Backsliding democracies are those with a gradual and intentional weakening of checks on government and clampdown on Civil Liberties.

There are, however, 10 democracies that had no apparent signs of democratic erosion prior to the pandemic that have experienced at least 1 development of concern for democracy and human rights during the pandemic and that therefore need careful watching, as this can forewarn declines in democratic quality going forward. The large majority of these are in Latin America—Argentina, Barbados, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay; and in other regions—Israel, Lesotho and Slovakia.

The aspects of democracy most affected by the pandemic are Freedom of Movement and Assembly, although the areas with the most measures of concern are Freedom of Expression and Media Integrity, as well as Personal Integrity and Security.

FIGURE 17

Democracy aspects most affected by the pandemic (by number of countries)



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.



Representative Government

3.1.1. Representative Government



Clean Elections

Challenge 1. Postponement of elections

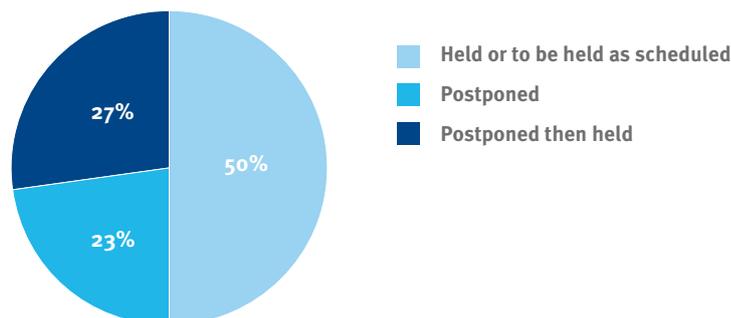
A core democratic process that has been heavily affected by the pandemic is the electoral process, with postponement of elections on a global scale. In 2020, across the world, for the first time since the start of the third wave of democracy, elections have been put on hold on a massive scale, due to the health risks posed by the pandemic. In fact, slightly more elections have been postponed than held on schedule during the pandemic. From the start of the pandemic until the end of October 2020, of the 185 elections planned, 93 had been postponed compared with 92 that had been held or were scheduled to be held according to plan.

185 electoral processes at all levels were held or scheduled to be held during the pandemic. 93 had been postponed by the end of October 2020, while 92 had been held or were scheduled to be held according to plan

The decision to either hold or postpone elections during a pandemic requires several considerations, as officials grapple with the challenges of the situation. First, holding elections as originally scheduled may jeopardize public health and safety. Elections are large social events and bring millions of people together, making it difficult to maintain social distance between voters. Organizing an election is difficult enough under ordinary circumstances, requiring the operation of polling stations, tight deadlines, a large number of often inexperienced frontline workers and intense political pressure. The pandemic has added unique safety challenges, required the scaling up of often untested voting measures, which have placed strain on resource and infrastructure needs, and introduced new logistical, administrative and integrity challenges and vulnerabilities (Spinelli 2020; Democratic Audit 2020). Pandemic restrictions on movement and assembly also present challenges for campaigning and fundraising (International IDEA 2020d). Voter turnout is also likely to be affected if elections are held during a pandemic (International IDEA 2020i). Elderly people and voters with underlying health conditions may opt to stay away from the polls as a precaution, thereby introducing significant new turnout inequalities among the electorate, with significant implications for inclusive voting practices (James and Garnett 2020). Another perceived challenge is that holding elections in times of crisis may help alter the policy agenda, as public debate shifts away from political party platforms and manifestos towards a policy focus on a single major issue and/or event (International IDEA 2020c). In polarized political contexts, the decision to either postpone or hold an election may contribute to increased polarization, with decisions either way perceived to favour certain political actors and undermine their legitimacy. Elections under a pandemic are also problematic for international and domestic observation efforts, which provide critical oversight of and credibility to the process. Taken together, these factors may well result in significant operational complications and delays and may ignite or deepen political conflict (International IDEA 2020c).

FIGURE 18

Elections during pandemic (February–December 2020)



Source: International IDEA, 'Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections' [multimedia report], 18 March 2020e, accessed 5 November 2020.

64 per cent of countries holding elections during the pandemic had a lower turnout than in the previous election

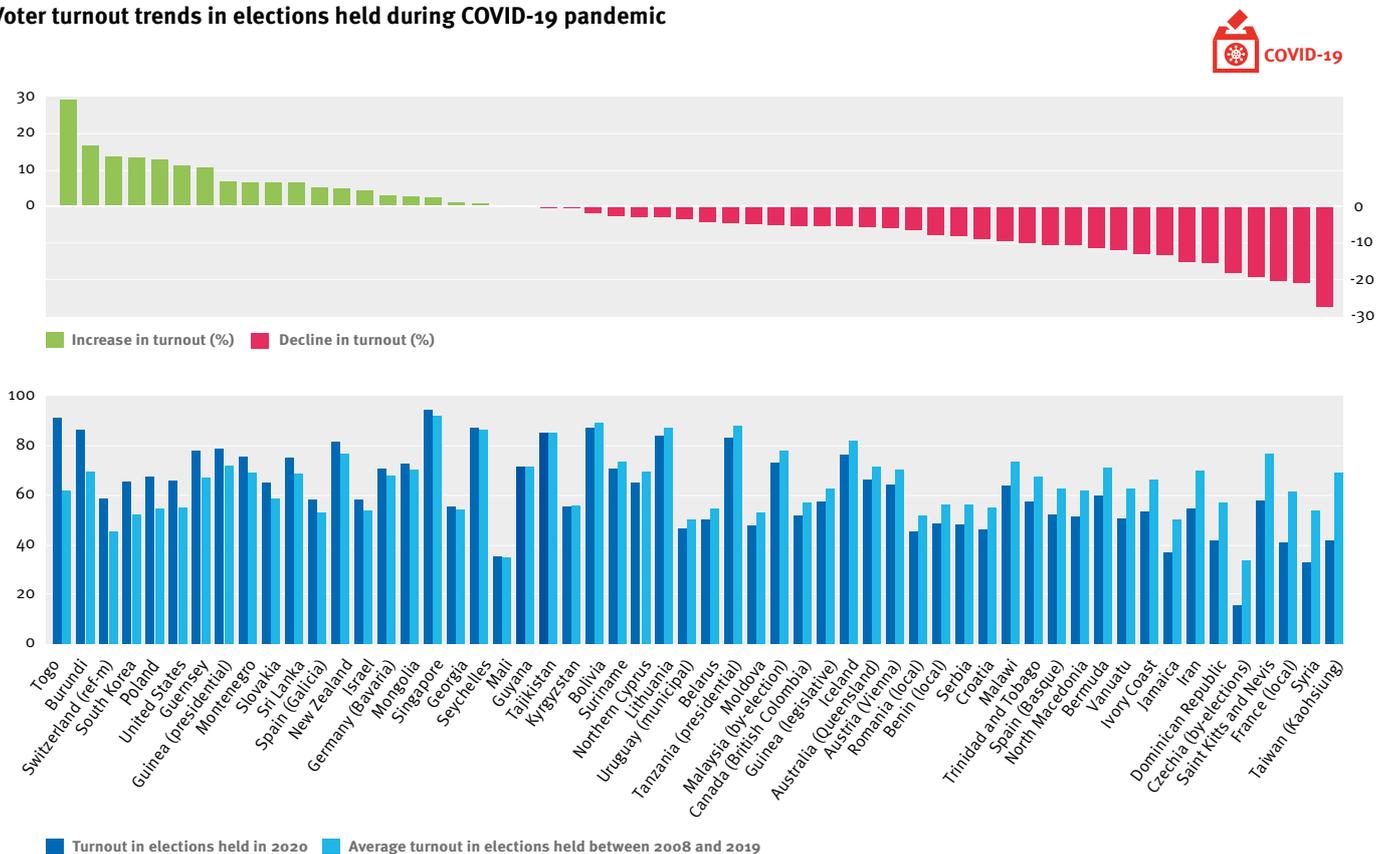
From a public health perspective, postponing an election might, however, seem a necessity to mitigate the risks of spreading the virus. Many countries have national procedures that allow for the postponement of elections in certain circumstances. However, the COVID-19 election decision-making process has also revealed gaps in existing legal and constitutional frameworks. In a polarized political context, a postponement decision can also lead to a democratic or institutional deterioration and, in the worst case, breakdown. In particular, it can be used as a pretext for repressive leaders to increase their power while restricting democratic rights (IFES 2020; James and Asplund 2020). Therefore, a decision to postpone an election requires compelling reasons for the decision to assuage the public, and democratic safeguards to ensure that the measures are temporary and legal.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, democracies were more likely to postpone their elections than non-democratic regimes. More than half (51 per cent) of the electoral processes in democracies have or will be postponed. Democracies had 3 times as many elections at all levels scheduled for 2020 (118 elections), compared with hybrid (25 elections) and authoritarian regimes (13 elections). Authoritarian regimes were more likely to go ahead with scheduled elections during the pandemic. Of their 13 scheduled elections, more than half (8) have or will go ahead as scheduled, while this was the case for a little less than half the elections in hybrid regimes (12 out of 25 elections) and a little less than half (49 per cent) in democracies.

Voter turnout has been affected by the pandemic. Of the 36 elections that have been held during the pandemic and for which voter turnout data is available, more than half (64 per cent or 23 countries) had a lower turnout than in the previous election (International IDEA 2020i). If the turnout is significantly lower than in the previous election, this can—in politically polarized contexts—be used by opponents to delegitimize election results.

FIGURE 19

Voter turnout trends in elections held during COVID-19 pandemic



Source: International IDEA, 'Going against the trend: elections with increased voter turnout during the COVID-19 pandemic', 30 September 2020i, accessed 10 November 2020.

While a few countries have held successful elections during the pandemic, in some countries elections during COVID-19 were subject to controversy, creating confusion and undermining trust in the electoral process. The world has witnessed opportunistic use of incumbency advantage, opposition boycotts, decreased turnout and disregard for public health in a number of countries that have proceeded with elections during the pandemic. Some examples are provided in Box 3.

BOX 3

Elections subject to controversy during the COVID-19 pandemic

In **Serbia**, despite widespread calls for postponement, the government moved forward with elections in June 2020. The opposition boycotted them, leading to an incumbent landslide that was sorely lacking in credibility. By declaring a state of epidemiological emergency instead of a state of emergency, the **Polish** Government bypassed the parliament and the election commission to move forward with an all vote-by-mail presidential election on the originally scheduled date (May 2020), bringing the country to the brink of a political crisis, as critics argued that the move favoured the incumbent government. Ultimately, under pressure both domestically and from abroad, including from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), a compromise was reached, a new election date set (for a first round in June and a second round in July 2020), and legislation passed to accommodate postal voting (Zaborowski 2020; OSCE 2020). The elections resulted in a narrow win (51.2 per cent) for the incumbent candidate Andrzej Duda backed by the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party (Walker and Rankin 2020). In other countries, courts had to intervene. In **Croatia**, the election management body excluded voting rights for quarantined citizens, which was ultimately overturned in court. In **Montenegro**, the Supreme Court overturned COVID-19-related regulations that had caused widespread confusion (EWB 2020). In the **Dominican Republic**, combined presidential and parliamentary elections originally scheduled for May took place on 5 July. Although the Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission (MOEA) characterized the elections as ‘successful’ and commended the extraordinary efforts of the electoral authorities in organizing the elections and ensuring voter safety, voter turnout (55 per cent) was 14 percentage points lower than in the 2016 elections (69 per cent), and the lowest in the country since 1974, while the parliamentary vote was 12 percentage points lower (from 67 per cent in 2016 to 55 per cent in 2020). The MOEA reported episodes outside voting centres where significant crowds of people did not practise physical distancing, as well as other practices unrelated to the pandemic that could affect the integrity of the elections such as vote buying (OAS 2020a).

In **Côte d’Ivoire**, opposition-boycotted elections on 3 November 2020 were viewed by international and domestic observers as illegitimate, and marred by irregularities and violence against opposition leaders and supporters, and resulted in a third term for the incumbent president, with 94.27 per cent of the vote (Richard 2020).

The **United States** presidential elections held in a highly polarized political context on 3 November 2020 have also been marred with controversy, with the president initially suggesting postponement due to the pandemic, going against constitutional provisions (Pilkington et al. 2020). In the absence of that possibility, he has repeatedly—including on election day—stated that, if he were to lose, he will not view the results as legitimate due to lack of trust in postal voting, sowing fears that he will not accept electoral defeat and may refuse to concede power. Voter suppression of minority groups, already a serious concern prior to the pandemic, was further exacerbated with several states passing legislation to limit voting for different groups, including convicted citizens, with a disproportionate number of members of disadvantaged groups affected by such provisions (International IDEA 2019). The presidential elections resulted in victory for the Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. However, in a historically unprecedented situation in the world’s oldest democracy, incumbent President Donald Trump had by the time of publication in early December (more than a month after the elections were held) still not accepted the election results, falsely arguing that they had been underpinned by fraud. All electoral bodies in the country dispute this allegation and have certified results, while the courts have rejected all of Trump’s lawsuits. The Trump administration’s own cyber and elections security expert declared the elections the most secure in recent history, a statement for which he was fired by President Trump. State-level Republican officials have faced pressure for acknowledging the electoral results, and Georgia’s secretary of state reported that Republican Senator Lindsey Graham had pressured him to discard legal ballots for the president-elect Joe Biden (Sandford 2020). While Trump’s further legal cases appear futile, he has asserted that he will not concede the results, and up to 70 per cent of Republicans now believe that the US elections were fraudulent with dangerous consequences for American democracy (Bekiempis 2020).

There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answer as to whether a country should postpone or proceed with elections. Nor is there one precise mechanism or regulation to ensure that elections are safe and credible. Key ingredients, however, have proven to be trust and consensus through due process and inclusive decision-making. Building public trust requires not only operational excellence, but also fostering a sense of shared purpose and meeting people’s needs for security and predictability through clear rules and avenues of redress. Only stable and well-resourced electoral institutions—

able to work independently—can hope to manage these complex dynamics. If electoral authorities fail to deliver elections that people believe in, if they fail to safeguard the elections from harm, they lose legitimacy. And once lost, legitimacy is almost impossible to regain. A contested election has critical consequences. As seen in Belarus, elections without trust can be the tinderbox that ignites underlying problems of past injustice or deep-seated social grievances (International IDEA 2020j).



Direct
Democracy

BOX 4

Referenda across the globe affected by the pandemic

Electoral processes at all levels of government and for all types of offices have been disrupted by the pandemic. Another type of electoral process affected by the pandemic are referenda. Examples of referenda held during the pandemic include Guinea, Italy, New Zealand, Russia and Switzerland (International IDEA 2020e). One of the most anticipated referenda in 2020 was the Constitutional Referendum in **Chile**, which had been one of the key demands of the protest movement that swept the country at the end of 2019. Originally scheduled for April 2020, the referendum was postponed to October 2020. In late August, a law was passed to allow the national electoral service (Servel) to implement health and safety measures for the plebiscite. However, in late August, Servel confirmed that citizens with COVID-19 would not be able to vote in the plebiscite, a decision that was opposed by civil society groups and which strained the relations between government officials and Servel. In mid-September, it was also confirmed that known cases of COVID-19 and those in mandatory isolation would face fines and criminal proceedings if they were found outside their homes on the day of the plebiscite. The plebiscite took place on 25 October and resulted in a resounding victory (78 per cent) in favour of a new constitution, to replace the one approved by the former military regime in 1980 (Bonney 2020).



Free
Political
Parties

At least **23** countries have cracked down on opposition politicians using the pandemic as a justification for doing so

Challenge 2. Opportunistic suppression of political opposition

The pandemic has been used as an opportunity to crack down on opposition parties in some countries. This has most frequently been done with the justification of curbing the spread of disinformation on the virus. This has occurred in at least 23 countries, of which 13 presented concerning situations. Most of these cases occurred in hybrid and authoritarian regimes, where opposition parties were already severely restricted prior to the pandemic, and where the pandemic has been used as an additional excuse for crackdown. Examples include Bangladesh and Cambodia, where opposition politicians have been arrested for allegedly spreading disinformation on the virus (Human Rights Watch 2020a, 2020d; Riaz 2020). In Cameroon, members of the main opposition party were reportedly arrested for distributing health material to the population (Allegruzzi 2020).



Fundamental
Rights

3.1.2. Fundamental Rights

Challenge 3. Restrictions on civil liberties



Civil
Liberties

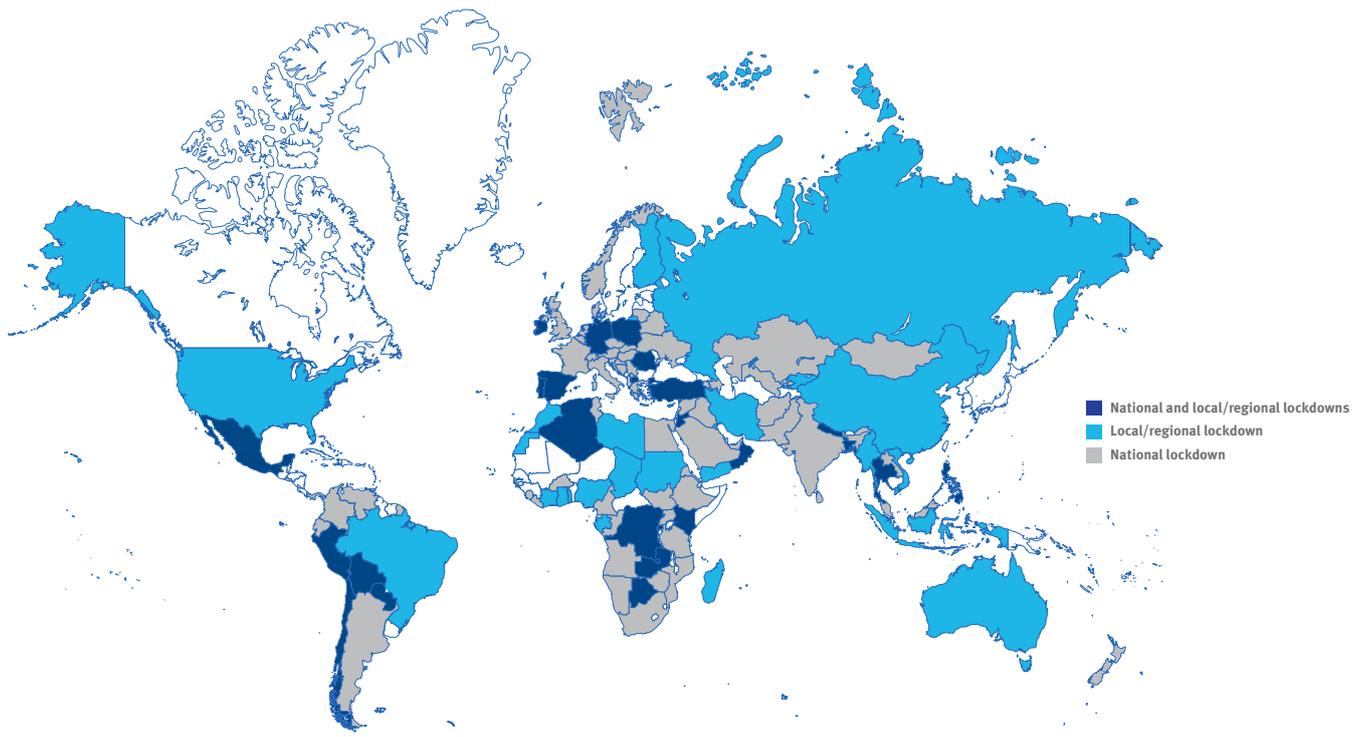
Civil liberties have been severely curtailed across the globe in order to curb the pandemic, in both democratic and non-democratic regimes. The civil liberties that have been most restricted during the pandemic are the freedom of movement and of assembly. However, in nearly 60 per cent of cases, such restrictions were made in the framework of constitutionally defined SoEs and, in many other cases, backed by other legislative frameworks.

All countries in the world have placed some form of restriction on freedom of movement during the pandemic, although the countries that delayed the implementation of restrictions the longest are the authoritarian regimes of Belarus and Burundi and the hybrid regime of Nicaragua (International IDEA 2020a). At least 96 countries put in place a lockdown, the large majority (83 per cent) of which were national lockdowns. By end of November 2020, restrictions remained in place in 118 countries, of which 23 countries had reinstated national or regional lockdowns (a few examples include China, Colombia, the Gambia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nepal, the Philippines, Spain

and the United Kingdom). Restrictions on freedom of assembly have been placed in 91 per cent of countries since the start of the pandemic, either banning public gatherings or restricting their size. By the end of October 2020, restrictions remained in place in 112 countries.

FIGURE 20

Global overview of national and local lockdowns imposed due to COVID-19



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.



Challenge 4. Attacks on freedom of expression

TABLE 1

Restrictions to freedom of expression during the pandemic

Examples of restrictions to freedom of expression	Examples of countries imposing restrictions
Passing of laws to combat disinformation on COVID-19 or amendments to or use of existing laws	Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Hungary, Jordan, Liberia, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam
Harassment of journalists	Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Lebanon, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania
Restrictions on access to information for journalists (e.g. exclusion from hearings and press briefings, delays in getting accreditation, and Internet shutdowns)	Cameroon, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Tajikistan, Tanzania, United States
Fines to journalists	Bulgaria, Cuba, Niger, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam
Shutdowns of news sites or media outlets	Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Yemen
Arbitrary arrests of journalists	Bahrain, Cuba, Guinea, Iran, Jordan, Niger
Expulsion of journalists	Belarus, China

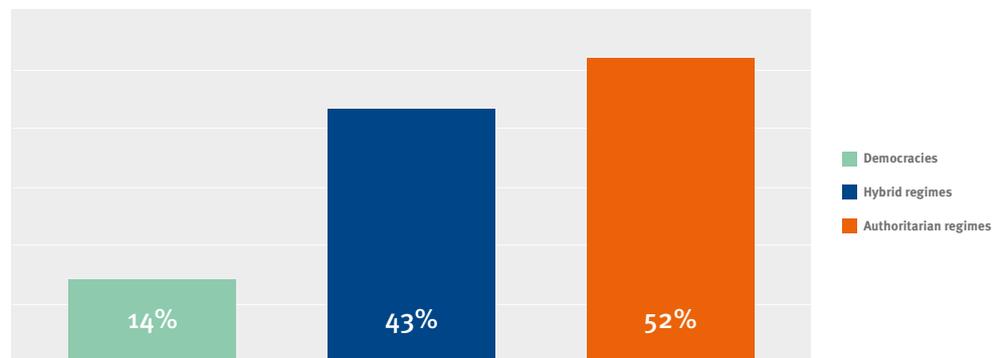
81 countries have passed laws or taken actions to restrict freedom of expression during the pandemic

Freedom of expression was already under severe strain prior to the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, half the countries in the world have used existing laws, passed new ones or taken actions to restrict freedom of expression (FoE), with the justification of combating the spread of disinformation on the virus. Measures and actions have included harassment of journalists, restrictions on access to information for journalists, fines to journalists and the shutdown of news sites. Measures have also involved silencing, fining, expelling or arresting journalists, news outlets, citizens, medical personnel, activists or opposition politicians that have either reported on the pandemic, shared information or expressed personal opinions on the pandemic handling on social media platforms. Such actions have occurred across all regions and regime types, although the most concerning cases are reported in non-democratic regimes. These actions are concerning as they prevent the sharing of vital scientific information on the virus, as well as a healthy debate and scrutiny about state performance in handling the pandemic and around options to mitigate its economic effects.

Concerning developments to restrict FoE during the pandemic were more common in non-democratic regimes, with 52 per cent of authoritarian regimes and 43 per cent of hybrid regimes experiencing them. However, 14 per cent of democracies also experienced developments that can be considered concerning, and almost a third (32 per cent) of democracies have experienced some form of restrictions to FoE since the start of the pandemic. Of the democracies that saw concerning developments in FoE, 70 per cent were backsliding, weak and eroding democracies.

FIGURE 21

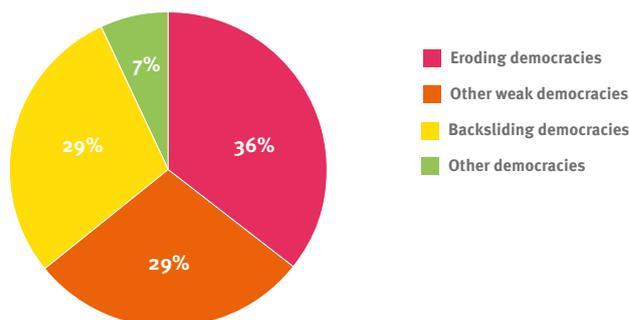
Concerning developments in freedom of expression, by percentage of countries of each regime type



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

FIGURE 22

Types of democracies with concerning developments in freedom of expression



Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 30 October 2020.

Challenge 5. Challenges in accessing information

Scientists and citizens face challenges in accessing reliable COVID-19-related information, data and statistics in many hybrid and authoritarian regimes, which limit sharing of and access to the vital information necessary to manage the pandemic. Cover-up of outbreaks of COVID-19 has been reported in some countries—for example, China (in Xinjiang region) and Turkmenistan (which denied existence of COVID-19 until May, when it reported its first case). In authoritarian countries (e.g. the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Laos) and Viet Nam), where the media is severely curtailed, neither foreign nor domestic media have been able to independently verify government data on COVID-19. And 6 out of 34 authoritarian regimes do not officially disclose any data on COVID-19 mortality (Burundi, Cambodia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Eritrea, Laos and Turkmenistan). In numerous democracies around the world, access to information has also been restricted during the pandemic due to lockdown of government offices and extensions in government responses to requests for information; some examples include Brazil, El Salvador, Iraq, Mexico, the Philippines, Romania and Serbia.



Personal Integrity and Security

Excessive use of police force to enforce COVID-19 restrictions has been reported in at least 70 countries during the pandemic

Challenge 6. Arbitrary arrests and excessive use of police force

Personal integrity and security is the other civil liberty most severely affected by the pandemic, with almost half the countries in the world reporting excessive use of force by the police or military to enforce COVID-19-related restrictions. There have been alleged or confirmed reports of excessive police force to enforce COVID-19 restrictions in at least 70 countries since the start of the pandemic. This has occurred in 37 democratic countries (38 per cent), compared with 60 per cent of hybrid regimes and 42 per cent of authoritarian regimes. A number of countries have expanded law enforcement capabilities to manage the health crisis, which—in a context of court closures due to lockdowns—has led to unchecked and sometimes unrestrained use of force (International IDEA 2020a).

Challenge 7. Military responses to combat COVID-19

TABLE 2

Countries with expanded military role during the pandemic

Military’s expanded role during the pandemic	Examples of countries
Use of military in enforcement of lockdowns, curfews and other COVID-19-related restrictions	Angola, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Sri Lanka
Military-run quarantine camps	Sri Lanka
Military supporting with traditional police functions	Colombia, Mexico (trend seen before the pandemic)
Military as healthcare providers	Brazil (to indigenous tribes)
Military personnel in charge of national COVID-19 strategy	Brazil, Myanmar

At least 25 countries have used the military to enforce pandemic measures

A number of countries, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, but also in Africa and to some extent in Latin America, have relied heavily on the military to manage the pandemic. This has exacerbated the excessive use of force already present in some countries. In Asia and Africa, the military was already an influential player and key factor in the democratic fragility of a number of countries prior to the outbreak. In some countries in these regions, the military has further expanded its presence by being given a significant role in the official response to the pandemic, including in weak, backsliding and mid-range performing democracies, and hybrid and authoritarian regimes. This has also occurred in Latin America, where the military had stayed out of the civilian sphere since the dismantlement of the military regimes that characterized the region in the 1970s. With COVID-19, the armed forces have been used to help control the pandemic, especially in areas such as logistics, transport, management of quarantine centres and contact tracing. However, in some countries, it has also been granted more extensive powers, such as maintaining public order and enforcing lockdowns and curfews. The potential repercussions that these new military functions may have for democracy need to be considered, and countries need to guard against viewing this expanded role as part of the 'new normal'. Clear limits need to be placed on this role, ensuring civilian obedience and strict adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights (Bitar and Zovatto 2020). This prominent role in fighting the pandemic can start to legitimize an expanded military presence in public life, even after the pandemic is over, and can undermine democratization in regions with a history of autocratic and military rule.

Challenge 8. Contact tracing and implications for data protection and personal integrity

Another aspect that has affected personal integrity and security during the pandemic is the risk to personal data protection posed by contact tracing apps and other surveillance mechanisms used to trace infections during the pandemic. At least 61 countries have used contact tracing apps or mobile data to trace contacts to identify infections during the pandemic. To date, it has been Asian countries particularly that have been at the forefront of the testing and deployment of technology intended to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. For technology tracking individuals' infection status, movements and contacts, effective deployment of tracing apps and their widespread adoption present dilemmas from a democracy perspective, including the compulsory versus voluntary use of the apps, appropriate digital infrastructure, and data sharing between government and app providers. Such contact tracing apps have been more common in democracies.

BOX 5

Examples of COVID-19 contact tracing

Some examples of deploying contact tracing apps in the context of response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic include **South Korea**, which has been widely feted for its efforts to flatten the pandemic. Following the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in 2015, South Korea relaxed its digital privacy laws to enable infection tracing. During pandemics, authorities can now access personal data without needing court approval (Gallo 2020). Private software companies have developed apps to supplement official contact tracing efforts, including Corona 100m, which is the country's second most downloaded app, and Corona Map. The first collects data that alert users to any COVID-19 diagnosed patient within a 100-metre radius together with their diagnosis date, nationality, age, gender and prior locations. Corona Map identifies the locations of all diagnosed patients. **Taiwan**, similarly praised for its government's response to the pandemic, is thought to be the first country to have used mobile phone tracking to enforce quarantine (Huang, Sun and Sui 2020). In **China**, the focus of official efforts has been on contact tracing. The Government partnered with 2 major companies, Alibaba and Tencent, to host health code systems on their widely used apps Alipay and WeChat, to monitor citizen movements around the country based on a user's risk profile. Users have to complete a questionnaire and are then allocated a QR 'health code' which is either green (low risk and free to move around), amber (at risk and obligatory quarantine for 7 days) or red (high risk and obligatory quarantine for 14 days). QR codes must then be scanned before entering public places. Access will be denied and the authorities alerted if the QR health code indicates the person is in quarantine. A number of privacy-related concerns have been raised in relation to China's tracking system, among others that confirmed and suspected cases are hosted on a centralized server accessible to authorities (Mozur, Zong and Krolik 2020).

At least 61 countries have used contact tracing apps to trace infections of COVID-19 during the pandemic. At least 10 countries have made such apps mandatory

However, in non-democratic regimes such apps are sometimes mandatory and could be used for political surveillance purposes other than controlling the virus. In total, 10 countries have made tracing apps mandatory and, of those, 6 are non-democratic regimes (Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Kazakhstan, Qatar and Turkey—although in China digital political surveillance was already in place prior to the pandemic). The democracies that have used compulsory contact tracing apps include Argentina (following guidelines from data protection laws), 1 state in India (Karnataka), Jamaica (for monitoring people under mandatory quarantine), Malaysia and Taiwan. Norway has pulled from the market a contact tracing app that was considered not to abide by data privacy standards. International good practice guidelines on the use of such contact tracing apps emphasize several points: the need for compliance with data protection and privacy legislation; transparency about potential commercial interests linked to the app; their voluntary rather than compulsory nature; ensuring anonymized data; their temporary nature; and not storing data in centralized databases to limit potential abuse (European Parliament 2020a).



Challenge 9. Pandemic magnifying religious discrimination and polarization in some countries

During the pandemic, more than three quarters of countries (at least 123 countries or 76 per cent) have placed some form of restrictions on worship—either closing places of worship, banning religious gatherings or restricting their size and hours. By the end of October 2020, restrictions on worship remained in place in 25 per cent of those countries or 40 countries.

However, beyond restrictions on worship in general, which have been recorded throughout the world and justified in public health terms, concerns have been raised over the reinforcement of religious discrimination and polarization in some countries during the pandemic. At least 4 countries in the world have experienced concerning developments in freedom of religion during the pandemic, of which 3 are in Asia (India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and 1, Saudi Arabia, is in the Middle East (International IDEA 2020a).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in India, religious tensions have been further exacerbated, with social media campaigns accusing Muslims of spreading COVID-19 to the Hindu majority and encouraging a boycott of Muslim businesses. Reportedly, Muslim medical workers have been harassed, and Muslims have been denied healthcare (Ellis-Petersen and Rahman 2020). Concerns have also grown about increasing intolerance against Muslims in Sri Lanka during the pandemic (already at a high after the 2019 Easter bombings), with the forced cremation of people who have died from COVID-19 seen as the violation of Muslim religious custom, and some media outlets openly blaming the Muslim community for spreading the disease (UCA News 2020). Religious discrimination has also been reported against various religious minorities in Pakistan, who were reportedly denied access to COVID-19 aid during the pandemic (Mirza 2020). Offline and online harassment of Muslim minorities in Nepal has also been reported, with accusations of such groups acting as ‘super spreaders’ of the virus (Aryal 2020). In Saudi Arabia, the pandemic has exposed simmering tensions between the state and religious authorities. For example, an Islamic scholar denouncing the cancellation of communal prayer gatherings in Saudi Arabia in August was arrested and imprisoned, and a cleric tweeting about his concern for prison inmates at risk of infection reportedly lost his job. The pandemic has also reportedly been used to crack down on the Shiite minority in the country (Abdo and Elnahla 2020).

121 countries have placed some form of restriction on religion and worship since the start of the pandemic, as part of measures to curb the spread of the virus



Challenge 10. Declines in gender equality and implications for the achievement of SDG 5

Women have been disproportionately affected by the consequences of the pandemic. Women all over the world are facing increased levels of domestic violence, care duties, unemployment and poverty (UN Women 2020c). Lockdowns have increased gender-based violence and women's economic and productive lives have been disproportionately disrupted by the consequences of the pandemic (see Box 8). Moreover, women have been under-represented in leadership and expert groups managing the COVID-19 crisis and have limited opportunities to make their voice heard in the policy responses to the pandemic (see Box 6).

An increase in gender-based violence has been reported in at least 39 countries covered by the Global Monitor. Most likely, this figure does not represent the actual situation, as in many countries data on gender-based violence both before and during the pandemic is under-reported. The current pandemic intensifies the difficulties for reporting,

BOX 6

Women and the COVID-19 response

- In 30 countries surveyed, **74 per cent of COVID-19 committees** had **less than one third female membership**, with only 1 committee reaching parity (Care International 2020).
- On average, women made up **24 per cent** of the COVID-19 response committees (Care International 2020).
- Only **32 per cent** of members of the World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Committee on COVID-19 are women (Gharib 2020).
- In 12 per cent of countries, there is a lack of women-specific economic assistance to tackle violence against women and girls, support unpaid care and strengthen women's economic security (UNDP 2020).

BOX 7

Women's unpaid care and domestic work

- Globally, women and girls are responsible for 75 per cent of unpaid care and domestic work (IDS 2016).
- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), on average women around the world perform 4 hours and 25 minutes of unpaid care work every day compared with 1 hour and 23 minutes for men (Cattaneo and Pozzan 2020).
- According to a survey conducted in 18 countries in May 2020, on average women experienced a 4 per cent increase in household responsibilities during the pandemic (Azcona, Bhatt and Love 2020).

including limitations on women's access to phones, and helplines, and disrupted public services such as police, justice and social services (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2020). In countries with reporting systems in place, a 25 per cent increase in cases have been reported. In some countries, reported cases have doubled (UN Women 2020a).

Reports also show that prior to COVID-19, women were responsible for three-quarters of all unpaid care work. This has increased significantly with restrictions and with the presence of children in the household due to school closures. During the pandemic, the unequal distribution of increased care demands has affected women globally, with a disproportionately high burden of care due to home schooling and caring for sick and older relatives.

BOX 8

Socio-economic impact of the pandemic on women

- Globally, women aged between 25 and 34 years are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. The COVID-19 crisis will likely increase female poverty. According to the United Nations, 247 million women will be living on less than USD 2 per day in 2021, compared with 236 million men (UN Women 2020a).
- Women's employment is 19 per cent more at risk during the pandemic than men's employment (UN Women 2020a).
- In countries for which data for April and May 2020 are available, the year-on-year decline in employment has been significantly higher for women than for men. For example, in Canada, Colombia and the United States, women's employment fell by more than 16 per cent (ILO 2020).
- Women are among those at greatest risk of joblessness and poverty. With generally less skilled and secure jobs, women are highly represented in the industries most affected by the pandemic (OECD 2020e). Globally, 40 per cent of all employed women work in the most impacted sectors, such as accommodation, retail and food services (ILO 2020).
- There are 740 million women working in the informal economy. Their income saw a 60 per cent decrease during the first month of the pandemic (UN Women 2020a).
- 80 per cent of domestic workers are women. According to ILO, 55 million or 72.3 per cent of domestic workers around the world were at significant risk of losing their jobs and incomes as a result of the lockdown and the lack of effective social security coverage (ILO 2020).
- 70 per cent of healthcare workers are women, who face multiple risks to their health, wellbeing and safety. There have been increased reports of both physical and verbal attacks on healthcare workers in China, Italy and Singapore (OECD 2020a; UN Women 2020b).



Challenge 11. Vulnerable groups and minorities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic

Over 90 per cent of countries in the world closed schools at some point since the start of the pandemic, affecting 1.5 billion **children** worldwide, who have lost out on both learning and school meals (UNICEF 2020). By the end of November 2020, schools had reopened in 124 countries, while they remained closed or had once again closed after reopening in 72 countries. A report from UNICEF shows that at least 436 million children cannot take part in remote learning because of lack of access to technological infrastructure (UNICEF 2020).

Migrants and refugees throughout the world have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, having poor or no access to healthcare and often being the target of xenophobic attacks, amplified on social media. Undocumented migrants in countries such as Malaysia and Nigeria have been arrested in efforts to curb the spread of the virus among those groups. This has increased the risk of infection in packed detention centres and provoked fear and hiding in migrant populations, diminishing the COVID-19 testing among those groups for fear of reprisals (Zsombor 2020). Forced quarantine of both undocumented and returning migrants has also been reported in countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Venezuela. And deported migrants from the United States have faced an increased risk of infection in cramped shelters in Central American countries. In countries such as South Korea, illegal migrants have been excluded from state-sponsored face mask distribution programmes, further increasing their vulnerability to the disease.

In some countries, **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI)** groups have also been particularly affected by the pandemic. For example, in Panama and Peru lockdown restrictions were gender based (with women and men allowed out on separate days), leaving out transgender groups, while in several countries (Myanmar, Panama, the Philippines), discrimination against LGBTI groups has been reported in the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions (Thoreson 2020; Aihua 2020). In South Korea, a COVID-19 outbreak in an LGBTI-friendly neighbourhood has led to fears that the country's efficient contact tracing will lead LGBTI people to be outed and face increased discrimination (Borowiec 2020).

Ethnic and religious minorities have also been severely affected by the pandemic. Cramped forced labour camps for Uighurs in the Xinjiang region have been a fertile breeding ground for the spread of infection, and breakouts have allegedly been hidden by the Chinese Government, while people have reportedly been forced to take traditional Chinese medicine that is not scientifically proven to counteract the virus (Davidson 2020; Lew and Zhou 2020). With Rakhine state in Myanmar the focus of a second wave of COVID-19 in the country, discrimination against Rohingya has flared up again, as they face accusations of spreading the virus (Nachemson 2020).



Challenge 12. Access to justice all over the world has been severely restricted during the pandemic

Courts the world over have faced restrictions to their operations during the pandemic. The activity of courts in over two thirds of countries (68 per cent or 110 countries) has been restricted during the pandemic, in the form of either reduced working hours, reduced number of caseloads or postponement or closure of cases during lockdowns. This affects access to justice for all, and in particular vulnerable groups, who tend to face more restrictions in access to justice. While court systems in a number of countries have switched to virtual or hybrid working modalities, some countries have faced both technical obstacles to digitalization and reluctance to hold virtual hearings. In Colombia, for example, a Constitutional Court ruling in July annulled a decision to hold virtual sessions for all branches of government, including the judiciary. And in the Gambia, virtual hearings have been denied in some

The activity of courts in 110 countries has been restricted during the pandemic

court cases (Manneh 2020). Court closures and restricted access to justice are concerning in a context where law enforcement capabilities to manage the health crisis have expanded in most countries, which has exacerbated unrestrained use of force in a number of countries.



3.1.3. Checks on Government

Challenge 13. Shift of decision-making power to the executive and risks of excessive executive aggrandizement

The public health emergency posed by the pandemic has led the majority of countries in the world (59 per cent) to declare national SoEs, which by nature increase the powers of executives to respond to the pandemic. Although, in most constitutionally defined SoEs, this shift towards executive decision-making is temporary and must follow a series of rules, these measures also carry the risk of executive overreach in a context of lockdowns, closures of key democratic institutions, such as parliaments and courts, and restrictions on free media reporting, which combined can lead to weakened checks and balances. When SoEs are indefinite or extended for excessive periods of time, the risks of executive overreach and democratic weakening are even greater. Executive aggrandizement during the pandemic has played out in the approval, and extension, of SoEs in some countries, where these were made by presidential decree or executive orders and thereby by sidelining parliaments (Egypt, the Dominican Republic, the Gambia, Niger, the Philippines, Thailand). In some of these countries, such as Egypt and Thailand, executives were already powerful prior to the pandemic, with weak and non-democratically elected parliaments. However, the COVID-19-induced SoEs have conferred even greater power to these executives. In other countries, such as the Philippines—an already severely backsliding country prior to the pandemic—the 1.5-year COVID-19 SoE, now the longest in the world, has conferred extraordinary powers to the executive, reinforcing a tendency seen prior to the pandemic. Executive aggrandizement is also occurring with regards to the management of public funds during the pandemic. While in most cases, parliaments are overseeing budgetary decisions during the pandemic, in some countries such decisions have also been made by presidential decree, which risks sidelining the parliament (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru). Moreover, some countries have taken the opportunity to set up ‘recovery funds’ to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic and in some cases these are directly managed by the executive without legislative control (e.g. Cameroon and India) (Human Rights Watch 2020c; Galbaw 2020).



Challenge 14. Weakened parliamentary powers and oversight

The COVID-19-induced SoEs which have shifted power to executives, in combination with disruption to parliamentary activities due to risk of infection, have contributed to weakened parliamentary powers and oversight in some countries. Parliaments have had to balance democratic governance continuity during the pandemic, while making operational changes to protect the health of MPs and staff, such as switching to remote working modalities (INTER PARES 2020).

In a number of countries across the world, the shift towards ‘COVID-19 safe’ parliamentary functioning, such as digitalization and other risk-mitigation measures, has been slow and a total of 35 parliaments have had to suspend parliamentary sessions—either for a specific period or indefinitely at some point during the pandemic. This was roughly twice as common in authoritarian regimes compared with democracies. Africa has seen the highest share of parliaments suspended due to the pandemic, while Europe has seen the lowest share (International IDEA 2020a).

35 countries have suspended parliamentary sessions since the start of the pandemic, although this occurred more frequently in non-democratic regimes

A number of parliaments have also been sidelined in the approval and extension of SoEs, as well as in the passing of legislation on COVID-19-related restrictions. For example, in Ireland in October 2020, the government proposed renewed and expanded emergency powers to combat a second wave of COVID-19, initially proposing only a 45-minute parliamentary debate. It extended scrutiny and debate only after protests from the opposition and civil society organizations (Horgan-Jones 2020). In India, the government has cancelled Question Hour at Parliament using the pandemic as a justification, and thereby weakening a key mechanism for executive oversight at a time when the executive has expanded its powers (Rajeev 2020). The limitations that some parliaments have had in continuing to operate during the pandemic may have compounded the phenomenon of executive aggrandizement and weakened their ability to review and scrutinize COVID-19-related legislation and executive actions.

In some countries, the pandemic has been used as an opportunity to pass legislation that would not otherwise have survived proper parliamentary scrutiny. However, these attempts have not always been successful. For example, in Indonesia, concerns were raised that law-makers were using the pandemic to try to rush through bills with minimal public scrutiny or debate, including a deregulation bill and a mining bill, which were among several pieces of legislation that failed to pass in 2019 in the face of mass street protests (Jong 2020). In late April in Nepal, Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli introduced 2 ordinances that sought to amend some provisions of the Political Party Act and the Constitutional Council Act while the House was in recess due to lockdown. However, after massive criticism from outside and inside the party, the ordinances were removed. In Poland, after postponing a ruling on tightened abortion legislation for several months due to a public outcry, the Constitutional Tribunal finally pushed through the ruling in November 2020, despite massive protests. In India, the government has passed 25 bills in 3–4 sessions. These laws include the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Act 2020, which apparently follows Russia's foreign donations laws, and has pushed Amnesty International out of the country (*National Herald* 2020).

Where government has been granted special powers to deal with a crisis, it is crucial that parliament ensures effective oversight of measures taken, especially where restrictions on civil liberties mean that traditional forms of protest such as public demonstrations are restricted, where media does not have access to decision-makers, and where elections have been postponed due to the health situation. In these circumstances parliaments and the judiciary provide essential oversight to ensure that government actions are both proportionate and effective. Democratically elected parliaments typically include representation from the diverse social, economic and regional components of the population, and are more likely to insist on equitable actions and measures than government that may be made up of parties representing only a bare majority or even a minority of electors. Parliamentary oversight of special spending measures to combat the economic impacts of the pandemic is also essential. Frequently, huge sums are allocated hastily to help individuals and businesses survive economic fallout of unemployment and loss of business. While these measures are undoubtedly important, they can provide wide opportunities for corruption and waste, and their design and operation need to be carefully scrutinized (INTER PARES 2020).

In terms of international legislative-related responses to the pandemic, a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2020 underscores the central role of legislatures in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, notably in their function as a bridge between what the resolution calls 'international commitments and national laws and budgets' (IPU 2020b). As with the pandemic's other major areas of impact on the democratic process, obvious and legitimate health concerns need to be carefully calibrated against legitimate concerns over ensuring that the functioning of democratic institutions and processes is not fundamentally and/or irreversibly impacted by ostensibly health-related emergency measures.



Challenge 15. Weakened judiciary and attacks on judicial independence

Limited operational activity of courts, in combination with increases in executive power, during the pandemic, has resulted in a weakening of the judiciary as a check on executive power in some countries. In Nepal, for example, the Supreme Court has made 23 rulings against various COVID-19-related government measures. Some of these directives are about the management of quarantine facilities and repatriation of migrant workers, but the Nepalese Government has failed to comply with most of these orders (Ghimire 2020).

In some countries, the pandemic has also been used as an opportunity to attempt to undermine and weaken judicial independence. The number of countries experiencing significant declines in judicial independence has increased significantly since 2008 and attempts at judicial weakening have continued during the pandemic. While it is difficult to know if such attempts would have been made independently of the pandemic, the issue needs to be watched. For example, in Sri Lanka, an amendment to the Constitution was passed in October, which will result in both a significant increase in presidential powers and the weakening of the oversight functions of the legislature and the judiciary (*The Hindu* 2020; Uyangoda 2020; *Al Jazeera* 2020). In Argentina in July, the president presented a legislative proposal for judicial reform, which he said was aimed at making the judiciary more transparent and administratively leaner. However, the proposal has been heavily criticized by the opposition as a move by the government to try to appoint favourable judges to protect the former President Cristina Fernández from ongoing criminal investigation into money laundering. In Spain, a high-performing democracy, a government bill presented in October 2020 to reform the judicial system, and in particular the appointment of judges, has been criticized by the European Union as potentially weakening judicial independence (Martinez 2020).

In a number of cases, however, apparent attempts to weaken judicial independence have not borne fruit and have instead resulted in battles playing out between different branches of government, including courts, executives and legislatures. In Guatemala, for example, in June, in a heavily criticized move, the Constitutional Court halted an attempt by the legislature to strip the constitutional justices of their immunity. However, the Attorney General claimed victory a month later, moving ahead with the stripping of immunity for 11 magistrates and 2 justices so that they could be investigated for influence trafficking amid the appointment process for High Court justices (Human Rights Watch 2020f).

Due to the potential for executive overreach and risks of parliamentary sidelining in a crisis situation, conflicts between different branches of governments have been common during the pandemic. For example, in Indonesia, a presidential decree on economic stimulus effectively allowing the state to spend unlimited amounts and endorsed by the House of Representatives in early May has been challenged in the Constitutional Court. Critics argue that the decree is unconstitutional as it grants immunity to government officials involved, increasing the potential for corruption (Crouch 2020). In Malawi, the declaration of the 'state of disaster' was challenged at the High Court, which paused its application until a final decision. On 3 September, the High Court invalidated the declaration, annulling all the restrictions imposed under it. In El Salvador, the president declared that he would not obey the country's Supreme Court, after it ruled the authorities could not detain people who disobey lockdown measures. In June, the Supreme Court also ruled as unconstitutional the executive decree to extend the national lockdown. In August, President Bukele heavily criticized the Supreme Court, saying that, 'were he a dictator, he would have executed the 5 justices in exchange for saving a thousand lives' (Sermeño and Velasquez 2020). The UN Rapporteur condemned the remarks, calling them an 'unacceptable attack on judicial independence' and a threat to the 'life and integrity' of justices (García-Sayán 2020).



3.1.4. Impartial Administration

Challenge 16. The pandemic has opened up new avenues for corruption across all regions of the world



The pandemic has opened up new avenues for corruption that need firm tackling, so as not to undermine public health efforts or trust in institutions. Tackling corruption was one of the hardest challenges for democracy prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Global levels of corruption have not changed in the past 4 decades and corruption has a corrosive impact on democracy, undermining trust in democracy as a form of government, fuelling civic discontent and diverting scarce resources for basic welfare from those in need. A 2019 study by Transparency International estimated that corruption in the health sector costs USD 500 billion per year and dramatically impacts on the quality of care (Transparency International 2019).

The Global Monitor has recorded alleged or confirmed instances of corruption related to COVID-19 in at least 43 countries during the pandemic, although this figure is most likely under-reported (International IDEA 2020a). Several other studies have also reported a surge in corruption during the pandemic (WJP 2020; Hanstad 2020). According to the Global Monitor, the Americas had the highest share of countries with alleged or confirmed corruption cases, although cases have been reported in all regions of the world. The main area of concern stems from the opportunities or graft opened up by the often large sums of money involved in contracts for the supply of pandemic health-related equipment—for example, ventilators, masks and protective gear. Most of the cases reported concern irregularities in procurement processes and the payment of overpriced medical equipment. Governments have been slow—and, in some cases, seemingly reluctant—to act to curtail and/or prevent corruption seeping through into this important—and financially lucrative—arena.

This increase in corruption cases in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can have catastrophic consequences for both human lives and democracy. The purchases of unsuitable equipment and materials directly risk lives, at the same time as they distract the authorities in their efforts to control the health crises. Moreover, in regions where the fiscal situation is very precarious, every case of corruption is a missed opportunity to use public resources wisely and to protect the most vulnerable. In the current context of despair that is emerging due to the pandemic and the corresponding economic crisis, the lack of public trust towards democratic institutions can rapidly turn into anger, if such cases are not dealt with firmly by effective legislative oversight, supported by independent institutions, such as audit bodies and anti-corruption institutions, and by citizen mobilization.



3.1.5. Participatory Engagement

Challenge 17. Civic discontent and political turbulence

The financial crises resulting from the pandemic will likely deepen civic dissatisfaction with democracies and non-democracies alike and heighten social mobilization. The world faced a protest wave in 2019 with citizens mobilizing in offline and online protests to demand more equitable policies (in Chile, Colombia, France and the United States), less corruption (in Iraq and Lebanon) and more democracy (in Algeria, Guinea, Sudan). These protests reflected frustration with current societal models, the perceived inability of traditional political parties to tackle them and new forms of social mobilization through more loose networks of individuals mobilizing offline and online, rather than through traditional organizations such as political parties. While restrictions on assembly during the pandemic placed temporary limits on these protests, they have erupted again in force throughout the world a few months into the pandemic, as citizens grow impatient with restrictions, and vent their

discontent about pandemic handling and the economic crisis. More protests and social unrest should be expected in the months and years ahead as economic hardship deepens.

Despite 96 per cent of countries in the world placing some form of restriction on freedom of assembly since the start of the pandemic, either banning public gatherings or restricting their size, more than three quarters of countries (80 per cent) have experienced protests during the pandemic, despite the restrictions. The protests have ranged from dissatisfaction with government handling of the pandemic, to frustration with restrictions and concerns about deteriorating living conditions due to the pandemic, as well as diverse concerns unrelated to the pandemic, such as racial discrimination (the Black Lives Matter movement). However, protests have in some cases been met with police force, in both democratic and non-democratic contexts. And in Colombia, the targeting of social and human rights activists has continued during the pandemic, with at least 28 social and human rights leaders murdered since the start of lockdown (Daniels 2020).

Protests have ranged from dissatisfaction with government handling of the pandemic and accompanying economic crisis, to protests against police brutality and calling for political reform in some contexts. This occurred, for example, in Thailand, where protesters have asked for democratic opening up and directed criticism towards the monarchy, a rare occurrence in a country where the monarchy is viewed as sacred. The government, however, has responded with a heavy hand, using the pandemic as a justification for imposing a strict state of emergency in Bangkok in October (Ratcliffe and Thoopkrajae 2020). The United States saw the coming of age of the Black Lives Matter movement in the spring of 2020, with protests against police brutality and racism springing up all over the country and spreading to others. In some cases, protesters were met with police force and tear gas (Rogers 2020). In Australia, thousands took part in Black Lives Matter and pro-refugee protests and marches across the country in June, and in September an online anti-lockdown movement organized street protests which saw hundreds of people gathering (*The Guardian* 2020; BBC News 2020a). In Myanmar, students have protested against the government and the military and the Internet shutdowns in Rakhine state, with arrests and prosecutions following (Human Rights Watch 2020e). Protests also erupted in Ecuador in May this year against the government's measures to deal with an acute economic crisis in the midst of the pandemic (BBC News Mundo 2020). In Colombia, multiple protests and unrest broke out across the country—with Bogota as epicentre—objecting to police violence and brutality, triggered by the recent death of a lawyer detained by police (Deutsche Welle 2020). Other minor but still relevant gatherings have occurred in many countries across Latin America by groups protesting against lockdown measures and demanding the opening up of economic activities.

While these protests are a healthy sign of social activism and mobilization, they could, if left unattended, grow into destabilizing civic discontent that will make it harder for governments to tackle the crisis at hand. This is particularly concerning in a context where the normal electoral channels for voicing opinions and electing and removing leaders have been temporarily suspended in many countries due to the pandemic, and channels of political dialogue between the citizenry and political parties may have been disrupted by the pandemic. This disconnect can be further exacerbated if parties and political leaders do not appear responsive to citizens' needs in a context of a health crisis and economic hardship. If corruption is added to the mix of economic recession and civic anger, the consequences can be catastrophic. In some cases, extremist groups have attempted to exploit citizens' fatigue with measures designed to contain COVID-19, in order to pose violent threats to government, such as the apparent plot to murder the Governor of Michigan because of her support for COVID-19-related restrictions (Bogel-Burroughs 2020). Inclusive spaces for dialogue are needed, as well as responsive political parties and citizen organizations, to bridge the gap between citizen demands and rebuild a more inclusive social contract in many regions of the world.

Challenge 18. Clashes between different levels of government

The pandemic has cast light on the complexities that multi-level governance poses for crisis handling. Conflicts and confusion about levels of authority and decision-making during a national crisis have played out between levels of government, and have affected pandemic responses. In some cases, national executives have mandated certain decisions, only to be overturned by regional authorities (Brazil, United States), or in other cases, there has been frustration about lack of clarity regarding national guidelines (Spain, Sweden) or perceived poor coordination between regions, and between regions and national government (Spain). The unequal resources and capacities of different subnational governments have also affected their response capacity, exacerbating existing resource inequalities. One key aspect that will impact on multi-level governance in the years ahead is the deteriorated state of public finances, which will entail fewer resources for all levels of government, especially for local governments highly dependent on transfers from central government—and this can trigger new conflicts.



3.2. Opportunities for democracy

However, despite the challenges that the pandemic has posed for democracy, it has also opened up opportunities and spurred some positive developments, which are important to highlight.



Opportunity 1. Electoral resilience

There are numerous examples of resilient and resourceful decision-makers and election authorities adapting to the radically new conditions posed by the pandemic, at breakneck speed, to deliver safe elections, resulting in high voter turnout, acceptance of tight results and remarkably quick resolution of obstacles through inter-agency cooperation. The availability of special voting arrangements, such as early voting, proxy voting and mail-in voting, and the ability to ‘scale up’ those alternatives have proven essential. This has required political buy-in, significant resources and planning.

Most importantly, in countries that have delivered a successful election process, electoral decisions were based on political consensus and public trust, which was maintained through clarity of mission and unified communication. The **South Korean** elections have been rightfully touted as a model, due to a highly competent national election commission, rigorous preparation and safety measures, special voting arrangements, including expansion of advance postal voting, special voting arrangements for COVID-19-infected people and a high degree of transparency, providing regular and detailed information to the public. The elections resulted in the highest electoral turnout in the country since 1992.

Europe too has seen success stories. In **France**, for example, stakeholders agreed to postpone local elections and the government quickly simplified and expanded proxy voting to ensure safety. In Bavaria, Germany, for the second round of local elections, multi-partisan agreement in parliament paved the way for an all-postal vote, which resulted in a higher turnout than for the previous election. The all-postal vote was made easier by a small voting population and the past experience of in-country postal voting (International IDEA 2020f).

On 27 September 2020, **Uruguay** successfully held departmental and municipal elections originally scheduled for 10 May. The elections proceeded without incident and following hygiene protocols developed by the Electoral Court with the support of the Ministry of Public Health and the National Emergency System (Corte Electoral República Oriental del Uruguay 2020). Those who did not wear masks were not barred from voting, but wearing masks was highly encouraged. Voter turnout reached 85 per cent (Noticias electorales 2020). New Zealand held elections safely in October 2020 throughout the country and saw the ruling Labour Party win a landslide victory and gain a majority in parliament for the first time since 1993, thanks in large part to the government's perceived successful handling of the pandemic (BBC News 2020b).

In **Bolivia**, the October 2020 elections resulted in victory for Luis Arce, the candidate of the Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo or MAS) party (the same party of former President Evo Morales), who won 55 per cent of the vote (Phillips and Collyns 2020). The opposition accepted the election results and no violence or irregularities were reported (OAS 2020b). This will hopefully put Bolivia back on a democratic path, albeit fraught with fragility and within a highly polarized political context. The consolidation of Bolivia's democracy will require both the winning MAS party and the opposition in parliament to overcome their political differences and reduce levels of political polarization in the country. The MAS will need to overcome its historical tendency to use its parliamentary majority to weaken the rule of law, while the opposition will need to recognize the democratic legitimacy of the Arce administration.

Despite the refusal of President Trump to accept the election results and his unproven claims of electoral fraud, the presidential elections in the **United States** provide testament to the resilience of US electoral and judicial institutions. They have not only adapted the country's complex electoral system to hold safe elections during a pandemic, but adjudicated fraud claims on a scale never seen before. Postal voting proceeded on an unprecedented scale to enhance the safety of the vote, and over 65 million postal votes were cast (Desilver 2020). Despite pandemic and structural suffrage restrictions implemented before and during the health crisis, the elections were held with the highest levels of voter turnout (at 65 per cent) in a hundred years (Kamal 2020).

The world stands to learn a lot from the countries that have held safe and legitimate elections with high levels of voter turnout during the pandemic. International IDEA will continue to contribute to document the lessons learned and good practices emanating from those cases, and share those widely, to better prepare more countries for holding safe elections during times of crises. This is particularly pressing as the pandemic continues to unfold and electoral innovation needs tackling in what becomes the 'new normal' rather than a context of disruption.



Opportunity 2. Political party adaptation

The pandemic has also provided the opportunity for, if not renovation, at least political party innovation. Prior to the pandemic, campaign rallies, door-to-door canvassing and political party town hall meetings were an important part of vibrant and inclusive democracies. During health crises with physical distancing restrictions, such methods need to be replaced by virtual forms of interaction. The most vivid examples may be the two first ever virtual party conventions in the United States in August 2020, with both Republican (partially) and Democratic conventions turning into massive digital shows, with around 23 to 24 million viewers, transforming a centuries old tradition into a digital gala never witnessed before in US democratic history (Mullin and Haggin 2020).

Turning to Africa, where Internet penetration is not as high as in the United States, political parties and candidates have resorted to the use of **SMS and community radios** to communicate their political programmes and mobilize voters during the pandemic, with examples from the March parliamentary elections in Mali (TV5Monde 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, traditional political parties in many countries faced a crisis of representation, and voters in a number of countries had turned to populist political parties and leaders following the 2008/2009 global financial crisis, leading to a surge in populist-led governments on both the left and right across all regions of the world, not least in Europe. The current economic crisis will press those populist leaders for effective responses to both the health and economic crises, and also open a window of opportunity for populist movements to gain more momentum and power. However, both traditional and populist parties in power will be equally pressed for effective solutions in this context and may become the target of civic discontent, as street protests all over the world during the pandemic have demonstrated. This may potentially turn the populist tide witnessed in recent years, which [International IDEA research](#) has demonstrated has been a key factor in the global deterioration of democratic quality observed pre-pandemic (International IDEA 2019). If this were to happen, traditional political parties will, however, need to address their crisis of representation and work hard to reconnect with voters and offer viable solutions to current and future societal challenges.



Opportunity 3. Parliamentary adaptation and resilience

The pandemic has forced and accelerated parliamentary innovation and digitalization the world over, so that parliaments can continue to operate despite the health risks posed by the virus. Parliamentary procedures have been revised in a number of legislatures in order both to protect parliamentarians and staff and to streamline operations. Some parliaments have enabled proportionate attendance and voting according to parliamentary group size, so that presential activity could continue on a multiparty basis, without crowded plenary and committee rooms. Different mechanisms were used to achieve this result. For example, in **Australia**, the system of ‘pairing’—where members from different parties who are unable to attend sessions agree to ‘cancel each other out’—was expanded, with members encouraged to participate in pairing to reduce the number of MPs in attendance. In **New Zealand**, a series of measures were enacted to reduce the need for physical presence: notices of motions could be submitted electronically, the number of permitted proxy votes could be increased, and oral and urgent questions could be submitted electronically rather than in person (International IDEA 2020a).

Despite attempts at parliamentary disruptions and attempts at executive overreach in a number of countries during the pandemic, particularly in its early stages, most parliaments have continued to carry out their core functions of debate, legislation and oversight during the pandemic through virtual or adapted forms of interaction. Once these new routines were established, parliaments have played a more active role as the pandemic has unfolded, in both the debate and approval of economic packages, in the extension of SoEs and in the scrutiny of government handling of the pandemic.

A number of parliaments have, for example, established COVID-19 parliamentary committees to oversee the government handling of the pandemic. This is the case in Indonesia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sweden and Tunisia. In New Zealand, the Epidemic Response Committee was headed by the then leader of the opposition (New Zealand Parliament 2020).

A number of parliaments, such as in **Finland**, have placed limits on special powers requested by governments, while in others, special economic measures that risked being inequitable have been extended to cover disadvantaged groups, such as the Traveller and Romany communities in Ireland. Parliaments have also rejected executive attempts to extend SoEs, thereby playing a counterweight to executive overreach. In Lesotho, for instance, an SoE extension of 6 months was rejected by parliament. Similarly, in the Gambia, the Parliament did not pass the first extension proposed by the president, forcing him to reduce the extension from 90 to 45 days. In Malawi, the declaration of the state of emergency by the president was taken to court and its application suspended.

In a number of countries, legislatures have played an active counterbalancing role to executive power throughout the pandemic, opposing measures to manage the pandemic and its consequences. This has sometimes resulted in clashes between the executive and legislature. While this is a healthy sign of democratic dynamics, it can in some cases put at risk the implementation of effective measures to manage both the health crisis in the short term and the ensuing fiscal crises. The situation needs watching in some countries, such as Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru. In Ecuador, the legislature and the executive came into conflict over the approval of an emergency finance law, which had been partially vetoed by President Moreno and had been the subject of tensions since mid-April. Similarly, the legislature and the executive clashed over the government's proposed Organic Law of Humanitarian Support. Likewise, in Bolivia, as of mid-September 2020, the executive and the legislature were locked in a confrontation over the approval of a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for USD 327 million to help the government deal with the consequences of the pandemic. Clashes have also erupted between both branches regarding the use of emergency powers and other measures to control the pandemic. In Brazil in July, President Bolsonaro vetoed sections of a bill making the use of masks mandatory in public spaces, while in late August both chambers of congress overturned several vetoes issued by President Bolsonaro on emergency measures to fight the pandemic (Federal Senate of Brazil 2020). In El Salvador, as of early September, the executive and the legislature were in confrontation over the approval of international loans to finance the response to the pandemic (Government of El Salvador 2020).

Opportunity 4. Accelerated digitalization

The pandemic has accelerated a digitalization process that was already under way in many countries prior to the pandemic. The pandemic has accelerated e-government processes in both the Global North and South, with governments putting in place digital tools—some new and innovative, others existing but scaled up. Examples include dedicated COVID-19 information portals, hackathons, e-services for supply of medical goods, virtual medical appointments, self-diagnosis apps and e-permits for curfews (UN DESA n.d.). The wide adoption of contact tracking and tracing apps to trace infections is also an expression of these innovative efforts, albeit necessitating effective privacy protections. In India, a hotline for citizens to report items being sold above the recommended retail price has been set up to help curb corruption (Transparency International 2020). However, despite these advances, the digital divide between poorer and richer countries, and within regions or groups in countries, remains a challenge, and efforts are needed to help bridge it and bring about a level playing field.



Opportunity 5. Local democracy cooperation

As the first line of governance—and in many contexts, effectively the only with which many citizens have any direct contact—local governments have been at the forefront of official responses to the pandemic since the outbreak of COVID-19. Clearly, the nature of relations with central government has been critical to determining the quality and impact of their efforts to combat the pandemic. In democracies such as New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan, there is clear evidence of a coordinated centre–local pandemic response. In some cases, the pandemic has also strengthened cooperation between different levels of government. Depending on the type of administrative division, countries have had different experiences of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous examples of cooperation between different levels of government (national, state/provincial/departmental and local/municipal) can be found and committees or other structures have been established to coordinate responses.

For example, in Argentina various meetings have taken place between mayors of different political denominations and the president—usually a very infrequent occurrence, given that provinces are responsible for municipal regimes—with positive results in handling some public health aspects of the pandemic (Ramírez de la Cruz et al. 2020). In Brazil, institutionalized instances of intra-municipality cooperation have helped small or weak municipalities to access supplies (Ramírez de la Cruz et al. 2020). In the case of Chile, municipal organizations have proved essential when taking local authorities' claims to the central government and expanding their competencies in dealing with the pandemic locally (Ramírez de la Cruz et al. 2020). The Chilean Government has established the Social Committee for COVID-19 (*Mesa social por COVID-19*) with the participation of municipal associations, government authorities, academics and professionals from the health sector (OECD 2020d).

Central governments of many countries have also made arrangements to continue transferring resources to subnational governments, even if in the short term. Mexico created a subnational stabilization fund (*fondo de estabilización subnacional*) to maintain the level of transfers from the federal government, and in Brazil, Chile and Honduras, funds from the federal government have been transferred to subnational governments to deal with the health emergency. In Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, central governments have made 'conditional transfers' (*transferencias condicionadas*) more flexible; similar action has been seen in Colombia with procedures for investment projects. In Costa Rica, the parliament has increased the legal spending threshold for municipalities (Radics and Rodríguez 2020).



Opportunity 6. The pandemic—trigger for democratic openings?

While concerns have been raised about the pandemic deepening autocratization and democratic backsliding in some contexts, it has also paved the way for potential democratic openings. The massive protests rocking Belarus, while not yet successful in their attempt to put the country on a democratization path, are a clear example of how dissatisfaction with government handling of the pandemic (President Lukashenko has consistently downplayed the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic), in combination with simmering discontent over decades of dictatorship and electoral fraud, has triggered mass mobilization to overturn Europe's only remaining dictator. The jury is not yet out on whether this will succeed or not. Kyrgyzstan, an enduring hybrid regime, provides another example. Mass protests erupted after contested parliamentary elections in October, forcing the electoral authorities to annul the results. Frustration with government corruption and the clan-based domination of politics, exacerbated by the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic, is believed to have played a role in the uprising (France24 2020). Massive anti-government protests demanding democratic reforms in Thailand have also rocked the capital Bangkok, leading to a heavy-handed government response and the imposition of a strict lockdown of the capital (AP 2020). However, the protests testify to massive simmering civic discontent and demands for democratic openings that are likely to flare up again.

4. Conclusion

Democracy has been one of the victims of the pandemic. Governments across the world have been using the wider conditions created by the pandemic to both expand executive power and restrict individual rights. Whether these developments prove to be temporary or, as many suspect, more long-term in their effects remains to be seen. Aspects of democratic practice that have already been significantly impacted by anti-pandemic measures include the exercise of fundamental rights (notably freedom of assembly and free speech). Some countries have also seen deepened religious polarization and discrimination. Women, vulnerable groups, and ethnic and religious minorities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and discriminated against in

the enforcement of lockdowns. There have been disruptions of electoral processes, increased state surveillance in some countries, and increased military influence.

Ten months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the countries that have been applauded for their effectiveness in keeping the pandemic under relative control run the gamut of regime types, from high-performing democracies to authoritarian regimes. Of the 30 countries with the lowest fatality rates from COVID-19 in the world, as at October 2020, 40 per cent are democracies across all performance ranges, 30 per cent are hybrid regimes (e.g. Singapore) and 23 per cent are classified as authoritarian regimes (e.g. China, Thailand and Viet Nam) (Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center 2020; International IDEA 2020b). The democracies cover all performance ranges, from high-performing ones such as New Zealand and South Korea, to weak and fragile ones such as Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka. All these countries have, however, adopted radically different strategies from a democracy and human rights perspective. They include examples of high-performing democracies such as New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan, which have kept the pandemic at bay while adhering to democratic and human rights principles, and other countries, including both authoritarian and hybrid regimes, which have done so at a high democratic and human rights cost. International IDEA argues that the world stands to learn from the success cases where the pandemic has effectively been brought under control in a way that also respects and fulfils democratic and human rights principles. Because it believes that only healthy democracies will be able to steer the world out of the pandemic and into a more inclusive, accountable and sustainable 'new normal' in the recovery phase.

Indeed, some high-performing democracies appear to be coming through the pandemic relatively unscathed, and some, such as New Zealand, South Korean and Taiwan, have even been strengthened as a consequence. By contrast, many authoritarian regimes appear to have tightened their grip on power and used the pandemic as an opportunity to become more repressive. The major uncertainties are to be found among weak- and medium-performing democracies. In many cases, the pandemic has played into domestic political processes that were already occurring before and during the pandemic, which have contributed in different ways to destabilize fragile democratic systems. In policy terms, it is critical that these do not end up falling on the wrong side of the democratic fence, not least as the pandemic's already severe socio-economic consequences become more acute over time. And, as one commentator notes, 'Much like the actual virus affecting people with underlying health conditions, the threat of reversal in democratic governance posed by the pandemic is more severe for democracies with an already compromised immune system' (Croissant 2020).

At the same time, it is equally clear that the pandemic has already ushered in—or is in the process of promoting—a number of positive and potentially significant democratic trends and innovations. To underline just a few examples, as one recent study notes: 'Civil society groups mobilizing responses on the front lines of the pandemic may reinforce democratic vitality at the local level. In some places, effective state responses may shore up trust in government or technocratic expertise. Electoral disruptions may spur needed innovations in election administration' (Brown, Brechenmacher and Carothers 2020).

Responding to this state of affairs, it is critical that democracy-support organizations, donors and other related actors all 'identify entry points and interventions that can pre-empt long-term political damage and nurture potential gains', as the same analysis argues, and design and implement programmes that explicitly aim to address the wide-ranging democratic challenges raised by the pandemic and at all levels—national, regional and local. Such a path of action offers at least the hope that the global crisis ushered in by the pandemic may yet become a source of democratic innovation and renewal.

5. Policy considerations

Representative Government



Clean Elections

Hold safe elections and with integrity, implementing special voting arrangements as necessary. If that is not possible, postponement should be underpinned by a broad political consensus, and a clear timeline for rescheduling to ensure safe elections can be held with integrity.

Resources and guidelines: [International IDEA \(2020g\)](#)



Free Political Parties

Guarantee that all political parties, including opposition actors, are allowed to freely discuss the pandemic and campaign for office without fear of reprisals and on an equal playing field with incumbent parties.

Resources and guidelines: [International IDEA \(2020d\)](#)

Fundamental Rights



Civil Liberties

Ensure that civil liberties are guaranteed for all before, during and after the pandemic and that any restrictions on movement, assembly and worship are implemented within constitutionally enabled states of emergency or other legitimate legislation and that measures are proportionate. Excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and criminalization should not be used to enforce restrictions.

Resources and guidelines: [Freedom House \(n.d.\)](#); [OSCE/ODIHR \(2020\)](#); [Human Rights Watch \(2020b\)](#); [European Parliament \(2020b\)](#); [UN OHCHR \(2020b\)](#)

If the military is used to manage the pandemic or enforce restrictions, these expanded functions should be strictly for managing the pandemic only. Clear limits need to be placed on this role, ensuring civilian obedience and strict adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights.



Freedom of Expression

Guarantee that freedom of expression is protected before, during and after the pandemic, allowing people, journalists, civil society organizations, policymakers, politicians and academics/scientists to freely share their opinion and report on the handling of the pandemic, and share data and scientific information on the pandemic without fear of reprisals.

Resources and guidelines: [Human Rights Watch \(2020b\)](#)

Ensure that all people, including vulnerable groups, as well as journalists, civil society organizations, policymakers, politicians and academics/scientists, have access to reliable and verifiable data and information on the pandemic, including COVID-19-related data on infections and fatalities, restrictions and regulations, and scientific information on the virus.

Resources and guidelines: [Article 19 \(2020\)](#)



Social Group Equality

Enable vulnerable groups and minorities, including women, children, the elderly, disabled people, migrants, immigrants and refugees, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, to have equal access to healthcare and information during the pandemic, through specially targeted interventions, access to healthcare and disaggregated data, and that they are not disproportionately affected by restriction enforcement and are protected from discrimination.



Personal Integrity and Security

Ensure that contact and infection tracing is done voluntarily, respecting good practice on data privacy and underpinned by regulations, and that data is not used during or after the pandemic for other purposes than curbing the virus.

Resources and guidelines: [European Parliament \(2020a\)](#)



Access to Justice

Continue to provide access to justice for all, including vulnerable groups, during the pandemic.



Checks on Government

Ensure that executive power is only strengthened within the context of constitutionally allowed states of emergency, which are implemented for a limited period of time, approved and overseen by parliament, and that the pandemic does not allow undue executive aggrandizement throughout the pandemic or after.

Resources and guidelines: Article 19 (2020)



Effective Parliament

Enable parliaments to continue operating during the pandemic and perform their legislative and oversight functions, including for state of emergency approvals and extensions, pandemic handling and economic recovery packages, while adopting new methods for operating safely during the pandemic.

Resources and guidelines: INTER PARES (2020); IPU (2020a)



Effective Parliament

Ensure that special economic packages are subject to proper legislative scrutiny and adoption, and that expenditures are effectively overseen and audited by parliament in conjunction with the supreme audit institution.



Impartial Administration



Absence of Corruption

Ensure adequate scrutiny of COVID-19-related procurement, and proper sanctioning of cases of corruption.

Resources and guidelines: OECD (2020c)



Predictable Enforcement

Make sure that regulations and legislation are approved, implemented and enforced predictably and transparently, and subject to court review and parliamentary post-legislative scrutiny.



Predictable Enforcement

Guarantee effective information sharing and coordination between all branches of government during the pandemic, as well as transparency in government reporting and access to information on the pandemic.

Resources and guidelines: Transparency International (2020)



Participatory Engagement



Local Democracy

Facilitate coordination and collaboration between all levels of government to effectively coordinate and collaborate during the pandemic, to effectively manage the pandemic.



Civil Society Participation

Ensure that civil society can continue to operate during the pandemic without undue restrictions, to provide services to those in need during the pandemic and to scrutinize state handling of the pandemic.

Resources and guidelines: International IDEA (2020h); UN OHCHR (2020a)

¹ For a list of regions and countries covered by the GSoD Indices in 2019, see <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/the-global-state-of-democracy-2019-METHODOLOGY.pdf>>.

² The generic term ‘state of emergency’ will be used throughout the document to refer to the lawful declaration that authorizes the executive branch to use exceptional powers to handle the COVID-19 pandemic nationally. This encompasses states of emergency, public health emergencies and states of disaster. The authors recognize that the name, procedures to enact and content of these declarations vary depending on countries’ legal and constitutional frameworks. This overview does not therefore pretend to be exhaustive and may not do justice to the vast academic literature on this topic, which provides for more fine-grained understanding of contextual legal and constitutional differences between such mechanisms.

³ The criteria for defining concerning measures versus measures to watch are provided in the [Methodology of the Global Monitor](#) (International IDEA n.d.).

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Abbreviations

FoE	Freedom of expression
GSoD	Global State of Democracy
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MAS	Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo) party
MERS	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
MOEA	Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PiS	Law and Justice party
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SoE	State of emergency
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WHO	World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

This *GSoD In Focus* was written by Annika Silva-Leander. Inputs were provided by the following reviewers and contributors: Elisenda Balleste Buxo, Alberto Fernandez, Erin Houlihan, Jonathan Murphy, Mark Salter, Maria Santillana, Alistair Scrutton, Tomas Quesada, Leena Rikkilä Tamang and Laura Thornton.

This analysis is dedicated to International IDEA's former Global Programme Director Keboitse Machangana, who passed away in July 2020. The Global State of Democracy work of International IDEA was a result of her passion and dedication to democracy. Her memory and legacy will forever be remembered and honoured.

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In 2018, International IDEA launched the new *GSoD In Focus* series. These short updates apply the GSoD Indices data to current issues, providing evidence-based analysis and insights into the contemporary democracy debate. This is a special issue in this series, focused on democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Design and layout by Vision Communications based on an original design concept by Phoenix Design.