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# THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY 2021

Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era

Summary of global and regional key facts and findings



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International IDEA  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00  
Email: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int)  
Website: <http://www.idea.int>

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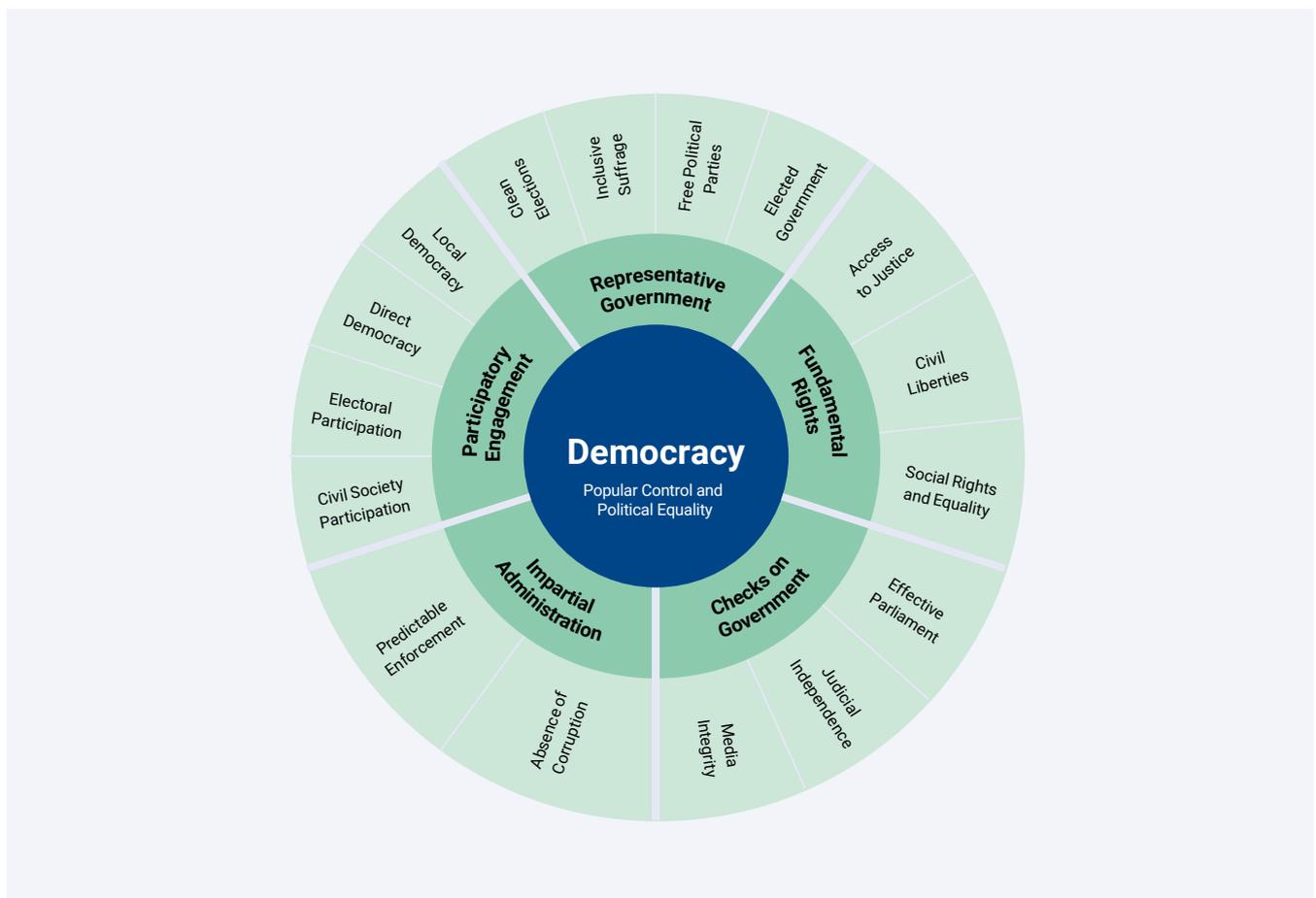
# About the Global State of Democracy report

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Initiative has produced biennial analyses of democratic trends and developments worldwide since 2017. *The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) 2021* reviews the state of democracy around the world over the course of 2020 and 2021, with democratic trends since 2015 used as contextual reference.

*The Global State of Democracy 2021* includes several documents: a global report, regional reports and thematic papers. It is based on analysis of events that have impacted democratic governance globally since the start of the pandemic as well as on various data sources, including International IDEA's [Global Monitor](#)

of [Covid-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights](#) and International IDEA's [Global State of Democracy \(GSoD\) Indices](#). The Global Monitor provides monthly data on pandemic measures and their impact on democracy for 165 countries in the world. The GSoD Indices provide quantitative data on democratic quality for the same countries, based on 28 aspects of democracy up until the end of 2020. Both data sources are developed around a conceptual framework, which defines democracy as based on five core attributes: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. These five attributes provide the organizing structure for this report.

## The GSoD conceptual framework



The [global](#) and regional reports complement and cross-reference each other. The regional reports cover developments in [Africa and the Middle East](#); the [Americas](#); [Asia and the Pacific](#), and [Europe](#). They are also accompanied by three thematic papers that allow more in-depth analysis and recommendations on how to manage [electoral processes](#), [emergency law responses](#), and [how democracies and non-democracies fared](#) based on lessons learned from the pandemic.

This document is a summary of the key findings from each of the global and regional reports that is intended to provide readers with the highlights across the five reports in one (short) document. The sections that follow specifically focus on the challenges and opportunities that were identified in each of the reports. They are also connected to International IDEA's broader three-point strategy for democracy building: Deliver, Rebuild, Prevent. The reports themselves provide more analysis and detail that will put these brief points in context.

# Global

## Key facts and findings

### CHALLENGES

The number of countries moving in an authoritarian direction in 2020 outnumbered those going in a democratic direction. The pandemic has prolonged this existing negative trend into a five-year stretch, the longest such period since the start of the third wave of democratization in the 1970s.

Democratically elected governments, including established democracies, are increasingly adopting authoritarian tactics. This democratic backsliding has often enjoyed significant popular support.

Some of the most worrying examples of backsliding are found in some of the world's largest countries (Brazil, India). The United States and three members of the European Union (EU) (Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, which holds the chair of the EU in 2021) have also seen concerning democratic declines.

Authoritarianism is deepening in non-democratic regimes (hybrid and authoritarian regimes). The year 2020 was the worst on record, in terms of the number of countries affected by deepening autocratization. The pandemic has thus had a particularly damaging effect on non-democratic countries, further closing their already reduced civic space.

Electoral integrity is increasingly being questioned, often without evidence, even in established democracies. The former US President Donald Trump's baseless allegations during the 2020 US presidential election have had spillover effects, including in Brazil, Mexico, Myanmar and Peru, among others.

The uneven global distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, as well as anti-vaccine views, undermine the uptake of vaccination programmes and risk prolonging the health crisis and normalizing restrictions on basic freedoms.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Many democracies around the world have proved resilient to the pandemic, introducing or expanding democratic innovations and adapting their practices and institutions in record time.

Despite pandemic restrictions on campaigning and media space unfairly favouring incumbent governments in some countries, the electoral component of democracy has shown remarkable resilience. Countries around the world learned to hold elections in exceedingly difficult conditions, and they rapidly activated special voting arrangements to allow citizens to continue exercising their democratic rights.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, pro-democracy movements have braved repression in many places, such as Belarus, Cuba, Eswatini, Hong Kong and Myanmar. Social movements for tackling climate change and fighting racial inequalities have emerged globally and continue to make their voices heard, despite pandemic restrictions. More than 80 per cent of countries have experienced protests during the pandemic, despite restrictions on assembly in almost all countries in the world.

Some countries have continued to make headway in their democratization processes. In Zambia, the opposition leader sailed to victory in August 2021, despite the incumbent party's strong-arm tactics.

There are also signs of the private sector taking on democratic rights issues, such as over the treatment of Uighurs in China, while forthcoming EU legislation on mandatory human rights due diligence for private sector companies may provide an additional push for greater engagement as well.

Recent research shows that authoritarian regimes have not been better than democracies at fighting the pandemic, even without accounting for the lack of data transparency in most non-democracies.

To curb rising authoritarianism and reverse this course, International IDEA calls for a global alliance for the advancement of democracy through a three-point agenda:



### Deliver

Government institutions, in close consultation with civil society, must take the lead in recrafting social contracts. These contracts should be the result of inclusive societal deliberation that sheds light on the gaps between what people require to meet their aspirations and what governments can currently provide. Specifically, these new social contracts, which will be the basis for immediate recovery and longer-term development efforts, should—at a minimum—address the varied inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, prioritize corruption eradication, and ensure that environmental sustainability principles are mainstreamed into policy development.



### Rebuild

Government institutions, political parties, electoral management bodies (EMBs) and media should reform democratic institutions, processes, relationships and behaviours so that they are better able to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. They should update practices in established democracies, build democratic capacity in new democracies, and protect electoral integrity, fundamental freedoms and rights, and the checks and balances essential to thriving and resilient democratic systems. They should also prioritize (re)building the mutual trust between citizens and their representatives that characterizes the strongest democracies.



### Prevent

Government institutions, along with civil society and the media, must prevent rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by investing in democracy education at all levels of schooling, by buttressing the pillars of democracy that ensure accountability, including broad participation and access to information, and by actively learning from other countries' experiences in fighting disinformation, building democratic cultures and strengthening democratic guardrails.

# Africa

## Key facts and findings

Recent declines in democracy have undermined some of the remarkable progress made in Africa over the past three decades, although bright spots remain. The Covid-19 pandemic, though seemingly less damaging to public health than elsewhere in the world, has added pressure on governance, rights and social inequality.

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### CHALLENGES

- While regular elections remain the norm for transfer of power in the majority of African countries, the democratic quality of these elections is on the decline. When taken in aggregate across the continent, the emerging trend of contested electoral outcomes, electoral violence, third term presidential agenda and clamp down on dissent are ominous for the future of Clean Elections on the continent.
  - Only four countries (Cabo Verde, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa) scored high on Representative Government.
- Attempts to erode presidential term limits present a risk to democracy in Africa by further entrenching the long-term presidencies that characterize many African countries. Presidential term limits play a crucial role in checking executive excesses and guaranteeing free, competitive elections.
  - In the five years to 2020, 13 African countries amended and/or eliminated constitutional provisions on presidential term limits.
- The re-emergence of unconstitutional changes of government and military-aided transitions is a worrying trend. In some countries, the transitions started out with citizen demands for political change, with the military stepping in to resolve the impasse between the citizens and the government.
  - Recent military-supported transitions have taken place in Algeria, Egypt, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Military intervention continued into 2021 (Chad, Mali).
- Managing the pandemic and its social fallout often led to a crackdown on freedom of expression. This move was prompted by a professed desire to stamp out disinformation about the pandemic, but more concerning were the efforts to confront citizens speaking out about broader socio-economic and governance issues and to restrict the space for objective debate on government responses to the pandemic.
  - At least 29 countries curtailed freedom of expression by criminalizing pandemic disinformation and adopting laws that restrict Internet freedom. To date, 13 countries have made disinformation about Covid-19 an imprisonable offence. While noting the importance of preserving lives and public health through the integrity of public information, these laws sometimes provided a basis for clamping down on the media and dissent.
- The pandemic exacerbated existing social inequalities and limited access to basic welfare and service delivery. Africa scored poorly in this area even before the pandemic.
  - In total, 34 African countries (68 per cent) were ranked within the world's bottom 25 per cent in terms of Basic Welfare in 2020.
- There was a continent-wide increase in violence against women. This issue was exacerbated by lockdowns keeping people at home and the loss of income and accumulated social stress at household levels.
  - Moreover, hijacked constitutional and electoral reforms compromised opportunities to address gender inequality.
- Governments relied on military forces to ensure compliance with pandemic-related rules. In some cases, this move hampered the freedom, legitimacy and competitiveness of elections.
- Use of excessive force was reported in 21 countries and the army was deployed in 9—including Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan—to enforce pandemic-related restrictions.

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## OPPORTUNITIES

- Electoral management bodies (EMBs) ensured that 15 out of 24 national and/or subnational scheduled elections took place in 2020, showing a degree of resilience. This accomplishment was despite technical, operational and financial challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.
  - In some cases, managing elections required extra funding (USD 25 million in Malawi); in others, it required recruitment of additional personnel (Ghana recruited ‘Covid-19 ambassadors’ to support queue control and enforce compliance).
- Improvements, which can be built on, were seen in parliamentary effectiveness—providing checks on the executive, for example—and parliaments were able to adjust to function in the pandemic. Parliamentary business was suspended in at least 16 countries in the initial phase of the pandemic, but by the second half of 2020 most had reopened.
  - Three countries (Cabo Verde, Malawi and Tunisia) have recorded a consistent, high performance in Effective Parliament. However, 15 countries are ranked poorly.<sup>1</sup>
- The existence of continental and subregional democracy instruments provides an opportunity for supranational accountability. Given the appropriate political will, these institutions will further promote democracy on the continent.
  - Continental and regional courts of justice in Africa have played a role in holding states accountable for rights violations, although compliance with court rulings remains minimal.
- The African Union (AU) and subregional institutions have shown that they can strengthen national efforts to hold credible elections. The AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community developed and communicated guidelines for conducting elections during health emergencies.
  - The proposed strategies in the guidelines are targeted at governments, political parties, EMBs, civil society organizations, domestic and international observer groups, election experts, think tanks and health institutions.
- Africa’s young population with an increasing awareness of human rights provides an opportunity for citizen mobilization and increased youth participation in politics. The median age in Africa is around 19.5 years, in contrast to the average age of 62 years for the continent’s leaders.
  - This is a double-edged issue, however: a growing population of unemployed youth creates a fertile ground for recruitment by extremist groups and for increased violence.
- The Gambia provided an example of what can be achieved when the opportunity for democracy arises. It registered advances in 22 different aspects, from Civil Liberties to Clean Elections.
  - The improvements followed the country’s transition to democracy in 2017, after an election where an opposition victory and international pressure ended the 22-year rule of President Yahya Jammeh.<sup>2</sup>

# The Middle East and North Africa

## Key facts and findings

The erosion of already weak democratic principles in the Middle East and North Africa is continuing, with a deepening of authoritarianism across the region. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this trend, providing cover for governments to tighten control over citizens, in some cases through physical force.

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### CHALLENGES

- Elections in the region are rarely meaningfully competitive and often take place in an environment marked by restricted rights and freedoms. Ranked in terms of Clean Elections, only about one-third of the countries in the region were either at or above the average globally.
  - Many elections are held with the sole aim of keeping existing regimes in power (Algeria 2021, Egypt 2020, Syria 2021). Parliamentary elections scheduled for 2021 in Palestine were delayed indefinitely by presidential decree.
- The region's tainted track record on protecting civil liberties was even further strained by the pandemic. The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices show more than half the region's countries in the bottom 25 per cent in the world when it comes to Civil Liberties.
  - Some countries used pandemic restrictions to repress citizens. Police made arrests and used excessive force to enforce lockdowns and curfews in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia.
- Media rights deteriorated in the region, which is one of the most dangerous in the world for journalists. The Media Integrity subattribute—a key part of providing checks on government and defending rights—was below the world average in more than half of the countries in the region, with Israel and Tunisia being the only ones scoring above the average. Stringent measures were taken by governments to silence the voices they did not want to hear. Six countries (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Saudi

Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE) have taken measures that are concerning in terms of democracy and human rights.

- Corruption plagues the region and has contributed to ongoing protests in several countries over the last decade. The pandemic opened the door to the increased use of bribery, personal connections and intermediaries as ways to access public services—to the detriment of those services.
  - Years of corruption meant that countries were severely unprepared to face the pandemic; when the first wave struck, hospitals and health centres had supply and staff shortages and lacked the organizational skills and effective systems to respond efficiently.

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### OPPORTUNITIES

- A decade of public protest has shown that demand for democracy is strong at the grassroots level. Civil society remains engaged throughout the region in seeking improved governance, accountability and standards of living. It has mobilized, since 2018, a second wave of protests to follow the 2010–2012 Arab Uprisings.
  - These recent protests have had an impact in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Sudan. In Algeria and Sudan, they contributed to the departure of heads of state who had been in power for some 20 and 30 years, respectively. In Algeria, however, the regime has since recovered a modicum of control and stability, as a result of a number of factors, including but not limited to fatigue and an absence of leadership in the protest camp, as well as state-led repression of leading opposition voices. A new constitution was adopted and a new president elected, which has allowed the state to resume many of its functions. Still, the country remains far from stable, since all the circumstances that led to the protest movement in the first place are still in existence today.

- Modest improvements in gender inclusion have resulted in more opportunities for women to serve in government. Progress is slow, but it is steady, indicating scope for growth; the latest assessment noted a positive trend towards gender equality in 12 countries in the region over the last five years.
- Within the last five years, Lebanon and the UAE have moved up to being considered mid-range rather than low in terms of their performance on Gender Equality. Iraq has made some progress—although very modest—while the number of women in the UAE’s parliament has increased from 22 per cent to 50 per cent (albeit appointed positions).

# The Americas

## Key facts and findings

1. The number of democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean has not changed in the last two years. Most democracies in the region have been highly resilient to the disruptive effects of the pandemic. Virtually all scheduled elections were held on the original date or on an agreed later date, or were legally postponed. In addition, in most democracies, parliament, the judiciary and the media have managed to adapt and continue to exercise their function of oversight, even in the midst of extensive limitations.
2. Nevertheless, the pandemic has negatively affected some aspects of democracy. Freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and personal security and integrity were particularly affected. The pandemic also served as an excuse for governments to reduce controls in public administration, which has facilitated several cases of corruption in the procurement of medical material or vaccines
3. Despite the resilience shown during the pandemic, half the democracies in the region have suffered erosion. Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Uruguay have all experienced democratic erosion. Brazil has the highest number of democratic attributes in decline in the world and, since 2016, has been suffering an episode of democratic backsliding. In El Salvador, several aspects of democracy have declined over the past five years and, during the first months of 2021, the Constitutional Chamber and some of the country's media suffered serious attacks from the executive and the pro-government Legislative Assembly.
4. Most democracies in the region have stagnated at a mid-range performance. Thirteen democracies (Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago) record mid-range performance, while four others (El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Paraguay) register low performance. Uruguay is the only democracy in the region with high performance.
5. Authoritarian and hybrid regimes have become entrenched in the region. Since 2007, the region has suffered four democratic breakdowns. Two of these have given rise to hybrid regimes (Haiti and Honduras) and the other two have led to the establishment of authoritarian regimes (Nicaragua and Venezuela). Cuba is the only country in the region that, to date, has never made the transition to democracy and remains an authoritarian regime.
6. The Dominican Republic and Ecuador are notable for the significant progress made in the quality of their democracies. Both countries recorded improvements in a number of indicators, especially Civil Liberties and Judicial Independence. Both the Dominican Republic and Ecuador demonstrate that democracy in the region is resilient and, moreover, has the potential to continue improving. It is also important to highlight the case of Chile, which has been capable of institutionally channelling the deep social unrest of the last two years into a constitution-making process.
7. Of special concern are the attacks on electoral management bodies. Such attacks, carried out by opposition and pro-government political parties and heads of government alike, have been reported in Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru. These are practices that threaten not only the integrity of electoral processes, but also the resilience of democracies.
8. Citizens—particularly women and young people—continue to play an active role in defending democracy. This is the case with the protests in Colombia, Paraguay and Peru in 2021. Despite restrictions adopted to contain the pandemic, which affected freedom of movement and assembly, citizens and different civil society groups have continued to defend their rights and promote reforms and social and political changes.
9. Regional democratic protection mechanisms need to be strengthened to complement those at the national level. The Inter-American Democratic Charter is particularly important because, 20 years after its

adoption, its pledges and mechanisms for protecting democracy have proven insufficient. Numerous attacks on the rule of law have taken place in several of the region's countries, often legitimized through the manipulation of democratic institutions.

10. It is urgent a call to strengthening democratic resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean. This will require short- and medium-term action, along

with a rethink of how democracy can respond to both the old and the new challenges facing the region, to prevent its democratic reserves from being depleted. There is a need to protect and strengthen democratic institutions, improve the quality of governance to channel and implement reforms, ensure effective and up-to-date regional mechanisms to defend democracy, and redesign mechanisms for citizen deliberation and participation.

## Asia and the Pacific

# Key facts and findings

The extraordinary diversity of the Asia and the Pacific region—not just culturally, but in terms of size of countries, systems of governance, and levels of economic development—has shown up clearly in the various responses to the Covid-19 pandemic made by countries around the region. There are examples of how the pandemic has been managed while maintaining respect for fundamental rights and legal principles, but also cases where governments

entrenched their power and/or where democratic backsliding was observed.

As such, following the pandemic, the region's democratic divide has deepened—with some countries performing exceptionally well, and others struggling significantly to maintain democracy. All in all, the pandemic tended to exacerbate and resurrect trends in democratic performance.

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### CHALLENGES

Attempting to contain the outbreak of the pandemic prompted most countries in the Asia and the Pacific region to restrict freedom of movement. All 32 countries imposed some restrictions, ranging from full lockdowns to limits on the size of public gatherings, and in some cases, these were combined with longer-term anti-democratic tendencies. All democracies needed to seek balance between individual and collective rights.

Freedom of expression came under attack across the region, in both democracies (such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka) and non-democracies (such as Cambodia and China)—with citizens arrested, excessive force used by the police, and criminal charges being imposed simply for publicly voicing criticism of official handling of the pandemic crisis.

A noticeable continuation of a decline in democracy was recorded in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka (as well as the democracy-ending military coup in Myanmar and stifling legal changes in Hong Kong). The hybrid regime in Singapore and the authoritarian regime in Viet Nam demonstrated unprecedented degrees of pandemic-response transparency, albeit while old habits of censoring and suppressing vocal critics remained.

A trend towards intervention in politics by security forces was noted in both authoritarian regimes and democracies, in part because official pandemic responses relied heavily on such military institutions for operational and logistics expertise. It is likely that the enhanced role of the security forces will outlast the pandemic itself: the military has long played a pivotal role in politics in some countries in the region, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Thailand.

Rising ethnonationalism, exacerbated by the stress of the pandemic, is undermining pluralism, increasing polarization and heightening conflict. The trend was most immediately noticeable in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, but there is a risk that economic damage from the pandemic and growing inequality may spread ethno-polarization further across the region.

The pandemic has afforded the authoritarian regime in China the opportunity to influence regional and global geopolitics, both on account of its perceived effective handling of the pandemic, and via its growing 'vaccine diplomacy' offensive, particularly in the Global South. At the same time, the situation in China itself deteriorated, particularly in Civil Liberties and Checks on Government.

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## OPPORTUNITIES

High-performing and economically strong democracies (Australia, New Zealand), and some mid-range democracies (Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Timor-Leste) generally managed their responses to the pandemic while respecting democratic principles. No country escaped the difficult balancing of individual versus collective rights.

Across the Asia and the Pacific region, the varied assaults on democratic freedoms intensified popular demands for political reform, including in Hong Kong, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand, triggering vocal pro-democratic responses rather than muting them.

Throughout the region, the pandemic gave rise to electoral management advancements and innovations. These showed how elections can be managed in future, also during emergencies, by ensuring the independence of electoral management bodies (EMBs), robust legal frameworks, effective communication and use of special voting arrangements, among other things.

Democracies, such as Australia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, provided crucial lessons to the rest of the world about how elections can be credibly managed under the restrictions imposed by Covid-19.

Dealing with the pandemic offered a practical demonstration of the benefits that decentralized and multilevel government (Australia, India,<sup>3</sup> Nepal) and inter-agency cooperation (New Zealand, Taiwan) can offer, combining local responsiveness, capacity and democratic accountability with collective and coordinated action.

# Europe

## Key facts and findings

The global Covid-19 pandemic has placed a strain on democracy: in some countries where democratic principles were already under threat, it provided excuses for governments to weaken democracy further.

- The state of two key aspects of democratic vitality—Civil Liberties and Checks on Government—in many of Europe’s erstwhile communist countries was, at the end of 2020, comparable with when they joined the European Union. The 2010s were a decade of missed opportunity for democratic consolidation in this subregion. Ongoing democratic backsliding intensified in Hungary and Poland, while Slovenia joined them as the region’s third backsliding democracy in 2020. These declines have created a deep and dangerous cleavage in the EU’s internal fundamental consensus on liberal democratic values, and highlighted the lack of effective tools to promptly address democratic backsliding within the EU.
- Europe’s non-democratic governments—Russia and Turkey (hybrid regimes) and Azerbaijan and Belarus (authoritarian regimes)—have intensified their suppression of political opponents, independent media and critically minded citizens. They have supported illiberal and anti-democratic forces beyond their borders, posing serious challenges to democracy in their neighbourhoods.
- In the Caucasus, Eastern Europe and Western Balkans, the pandemic has chipped away at the building blocks of democracy. These included the aspects Clean Elections, Free Political Parties, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, and Checks on Government. In Albania, Georgia and Serbia, winner-take-all behaviour by ruling elites resulted in parliamentary boycotts by the opposition. For the first time in 20 years, Serbia is no longer categorized as a democracy but as a hybrid regime, which will stifle its EU-accession discussions.
- Across the continent, governments struggled with the proportionality of the restrictions on fundamental rights they put in place in response to the pandemic. Two-thirds of European countries imposed restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association, and Freedom of Movement. These restrictions had a widespread impact on other fundamental rights and democratic principles, such as the right to education for schoolchildren and the right to work for the many adults who lost their jobs. The proportionality of emergency measures thus proved to be the true litmus test for democratic resilience across Europe.
- Freedom of Expression and Media Integrity came under serious strain—and not just in authoritarian regimes. Dangerous practices ranged from uncooperative attitudes by state officials towards journalists, to harassment and threats made to media outlets. Several countries capitalized on alleged threats of pandemic disinformation to further repress freedom of speech, both offline and online. Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Russia, Serbia and Turkey made disinformation regarding Covid-19 an imprisonable offence or increased criminal sanctions, creating opportunities for to abuse.
- The pandemic was a major test for free elections and electoral management bodies (EMBs), given the need to balance health and safety concerns with the requirements of election schedules. At times, this created opportunities for politicians to interfere in electoral administration and compromise the independence of these institutions. Increased online campaigning heightened the salience of disinformation, foreign interference, and abuse of data. Clean Elections measures declined in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Turkey.
- The pandemic intensified entrenched social and economic inequalities. This led to heightened insecurities, especially for women, marginalized communities and migrants. Inequalities faced by women were particularly reinforced and exacerbated, as their level of unpaid care and domestic work increased during the pandemic. Precarious employment schemes put many women out of jobs, and gender-based violence and domestic violence increased under lockdown situations, which also further limited women’s ability to get away from abuse.

- The pandemic has showcased the importance of parliaments in sustaining democratic governance. As many governments rushed to invoke emergency powers, some legislatures impressively rose to the task of exercising proactive oversight. Where ruling parties had solidified their control of the legislature, some parliaments were muted, and self-divested from systematic and rigorous oversight. There is an opportunity to strengthen the culture and practice of parliamentary oversight to build more resilient democratic systems that function effectively during both ordinary times and emergencies.
- The pandemic has also tested judiciaries and independent oversight bodies. It became abundantly clear which systems could perform their functions effectively in a crisis. Resilience against executive overreach was achieved where there were clear constitutional mandates for oversight of the executive, independence from political pressures and prioritization of rule of law over political allegiance.
- The pandemic has focused a renewed spotlight on long-entrenched inefficiencies in public administration, a lack of accountability and the prevalence of corruption. This could provide momentum for creating more effective and responsive governance systems, which protect citizens in crisis situations, and could spur action to improve the integrity of democratic systems and forge better, more equitable social contracts.
- In both established and fledgling democracies, the imposition of limitations on Fundamental Rights during the pandemic was often met with increased civic activism and engagement. This underlined the importance of civic literacy for many in Europe. Building on this may lead to more civic vigilance in the future over government actions and less taking the gains of democracy for granted.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.
- <sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Gambia: Commission uncovered ex-president's alleged crimes', 24 May 2021, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20210813061809/https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/24/gambia-commission-uncovered-ex-presidents-alleged-crimes>>, archived 21 July 2021.
- <sup>3</sup> Menon, R., *Multi-Level Government and Covid-19: Lessons from India's Experience*, Melbourne Forum on Constitution-Building (International IDEA and Constitution Transformation Network, 2020), <[https://web.archive.org/save/https://law.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/3474723/MF20-Web3-India-RamMenon-REVISION.pdf](https://web.archive.org/save/https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/3474723/MF20-Web3-India-RamMenon-REVISION.pdf)>, archived 15 September 2021.

# About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

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## WHAT DO WE DO?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work.

International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on good international democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

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## WHERE DO WE WORK?

Our headquarters is located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<<https://www.idea.int>>









**International IDEA**  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden  
+46 8 698 37 00  
info@idea.int  
www.idea.int