

Nhongo Solo
Abatsha Force of Change

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) not only threatens the health of the population, and major sections of the economy, it also challenges elections throughout the democratic world. The fear of becoming infected with the virus may cause selective participation, where a non-negligible fraction of voters, particularly those with higher health risks (such as elderly and vulnerable voters), abstain from voting. Selective participation may lead to reduced legitimacy of elected representatives and open the door to controversies and may eventually trigger social and political polarization and conflicts. In this will however show that with precautions put in place the illegitimacy of elections can be avoided.

In this context, we provide empirical evidence of COVID-19 for electoral participation. To do that, we scrutinize the 2020/ 2021 Local Bi-Elections that took place in our country. In this paper, we show that during this major pandemic, in-person voting was characterized by substantially depressed turnout rates. More importantly, we show that the ongoing COVID-19 sanitary crisis, which in our country started in early 2020, has never reduced electoral participation in the municipal bi- elections nor did it increase the Covid 19 statistics or expose participants to Covid 19 with all the correct measures in place. The paper will also prove that the purpose of elections is to put officials into office so that they may execute the power to serve the society, yet the officials instead use the power to steal from the society and there nullifies their legitimacy. Effects of disease Outbreak:

A vast literature has documented that electoral participation is affected by all kinds of impediments that raise the cost borne by individual voters, which is known as the voting calculus framework. Usually, the calculus of voting is defined as the expected benefit of voting (satisfaction associated with the preferred candidate times the probability of being the decisive voter) plus the satisfaction of voting that is independent from election outcomes minus the cost of voting.

From this framework research further reveals that, the cost of voting has two main components: firstly, it is the cost borne by people to prepare their voting decisions, such as the amount of time and resources used to collect information about the candidates, their programs, and the main election issues. Secondly, people also bear a cost strictly associated with the action of voting, although this is low in South Africa, it includes the time needed to go to the polling station, waiting in line, casting

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the ballot, etc. Many studies have highlighted various drivers of electoral turnout affecting such these two costs:

- Transportation costs which we know it only applies to elders in South Africa given close voting districts,
- Weather on the date of election, which we agree that October's weather is normally favourable and is not winter which is normally the season that is cold and increases the spike of the Pandemic.
- Day of the week
- Voting technology and voting processes.

Against this background, what are the expected effects of epidemic on electoral participation. A rapidly spreading disease distorts the cost of voting in two ways. First, the cost of voting naturally increases for infected individuals suffering from severe fatigue. Therefore, they are less likely to go to the polling station and cast their ballots. The cost is also reinforced by a voter's altruism: not participating limits the spread of the disease due to the voter's absence. However, we argue that IEC must put in place online technology for online application of special voting. Then all eligible voters with underlying health conditions & the elders can vote on a special day alternatively at home. To avoid carrying this risk even on the actual day of voting all Covid 19 regulations should be adhered to (<https://www.gov.za/coronavirus/alert-level-2>).

At the start of the pandemic, many countries postponed elections. From June 2020, the trend shifted to holding elections. Thanks to information sharing and peer-to-peer exchanges, election authorities gained an understanding of the risks and prevention/mitigation measures. To date, more than 100 countries and territories have held national or subnational elections that were either on schedule or initially postponed with health and safety measures. But what measures have been introduced so far? What measures have been adopted by countries that have held elections? Are the measures respected by stakeholders? Was voting safe?

This article helps to address these questions by presenting information on the health and safety measures introduced into polling stations around the world in 2020. Data

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was collected from electoral management bodies (EMBs), state institutions, media, and election observation reports from 52 national elections (in 51 countries) in 2020 on how in-person voting was implemented. This was most of the countries that held national elections, but which also had cases of Covid-19 at the time. This analysis forms part of a series that has covered campaign limitations and will cover other parts of the electoral cycle, including special voting arrangements and international elections observation. It forms part of an ongoing study between International IDEA and the Electoral Integrity Project on Covid-19 and elections.

Health and safety guidelines

One of the first steps that EMBs or state institutions took to limit infection risk, often in collaboration with health ministries, was to introduce health and safety guidelines for the election. The guidelines typically focused on the voting operations or the entire electoral cycle (nomination processes, training, voter registration, campaigning, voting operations, set-up of polling stations, counting and tabulation, result announcements). Out of this sample of 20 sets of national guidelines from 19 different countries, 1 covered nomination processes, 6 training, 3 voter registration, 7 campaigning, 18 voting operations, 18 set-up of polling stations, 11 counting and tabulation, and 1 addressed result announcements.

Pointers:

1. Bi-elections successfully took place with no Covid results
2. Politicians are voted for by voters u cannot then ask those voted when they should still or go instead of voters
3. Same political parties claiming to be concerned about safety held rallies where they did not even observe regulations
4. Politics should not be about popularism which is something happening now it should he about serving society. Community activists should already be known by now and if not, it means they not supposed to serve. Parties are concerned about rallies that got nothing to do with working with people but rather popularism and propaganda. If parties are concerned about the poor, they poor are constantly at their homes where they should go and find them after all even when we on level 2/3 even 4/5 there was nothing stopping us to go and visit each other therefore Door to Door is doable.

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5. Not only the country but the world is moving to 4IR and IEC by now should be ready for online voting. _ out of _ (research) managed to proceed with their elections during the pandemic.

6. The pandemic has revealed the level of corruption and looting ... (research) and we therefore cannot keep such leaders.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to have a massive negative impact on turnout rates, as we have shown occurred in the 2020 municipal elections in France. Overall turnout decreased by a record 20 percentage points.

We clearly show that COVID-19 negatively affected participation in municipalities with a larger fraction of elderly characterized by a higher risk to develop severe COVID-19 illness and near COVID-19 clusters. Moreover, municipalities with a higher population density or where only one list was running at the election experienced a lower mobilization. The differentiated participation across population groups can have consequences for vote shares.

Although other factors also played a role, the COVID-19 pandemic was a strong driving force behind this historic fall. This result, obtained at local elections, should be confirmed in the context of national elections. However, the calculus of voting is identical at national elections as at local ones, so we expect a similar potential incidence of outbreak on national elections, all other things being equal. Among other things that vary from one election to another, the management of the election and the ballot change according to national practice and institutions. Since the election organization influences the cost of voting and the risk of being infected, both the extension of our results and the answer to the issues raised by unusually low participation rely on the solutions available to organize a ballot. The implementation of any voting methods reducing social interactions, and thus the cost of voting for citizens, would reduce the impact of outbreak on election outcomes. These well-known methods are early-voting, vote-by-mail, electronic voting, etc.

Beyond the debated question around the influence of low participation on election outcomes, this issue may have other major implications such as a lack of legitimacy

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of elected officials, which in turn may open the door to large dissent of the decisions they make.

References

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