



COVID-19 AND ELECTIONS

The coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, has brought unprecedented social, political and economic challenges on a global scale. Aware of the importance of facing up to this new reality, at International IDEA we have initiated a series of studies, articles and analyses with the aim of understanding the impact of the pandemic on electoral processes and focused on providing elements that allow decision-makers and citizens to take measures that protect democracy. Thus, from the Institute's website, a [special section named COVID-19 and democracy](#) has been created to analyze the political decision-making processes at the local, national and global levels, as well as the impact of these decisions on elections and their influence on governance.

By the end of April 2020, national, sub-national and/or referendum processes have been postponed in 68 countries and territories around the world, while in eight countries elections or referendums have been held as originally scheduled and despite the international emergency. Among the latter, the following stand out: municipal elections in the Dominican Republic (March 15, 2020); legislative elections in Israel (March 2, 2020); local elections in France (March 15, 2020); municipal second round elections in Geneva, Switzerland (April 4, 2020) only by postal vote and parliamentary elections in South Korea (April 15, 2020) to mention a few examples.

Decision-making in any of the above-mentioned senses involves a number of elements that must be observed by the authorities. Given this scenario, IDEA's technical paper on [Elections and COVID-19](#) establishes the importance of evaluating risks and implications before deciding to postpone or continue with the holding of an election, as well as considering the scope for governments, electoral bodies and health authorities. Decision-making must be responsible and informed, creating mechanisms that involve both electoral and public health authorities and ensuring effective internal and external communication.

With regard to risk assessment, the document highlights the importance of: a) not compromising confidence in the democratic process and institutions, b) not affecting equity in citizen participation by restricting the participation of people who are highly vulnerable due to contagion, c) considering equity in the electoral contest for all actors (both government and opposition), d) including a human rights perspective, e) accounting for financial risks, f) considering operational risks, and g) assessing legal and constitutional risks.

If the electoral process continues, IDEA proposes a series of operational guidelines for the best organization of an Election Day, ranging from the operation of the polling stations to the implementation of voting methods that minimize direct contact such as postal voting or early voting, ensuring a healthy distance, avoiding the manipulation of identifications and credentials as much as possible, among other measures to protect the officials and the citizens themselves.

In the midst of the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated, it is necessary to consider and abide by constitutional and legal procedures, while maintaining a special care of the implications that the implemented measures have on democracy, inclusion, accountability and human rights. Confronting this crisis is not about giving up fundamental freedoms, but about preparing democracies to respond to the demands of the citizenry (Casas-Zamora, 2020).

It is for this reason that the mission of International IDEA, to promote democracy in the world, as a facilitator of sustainable development more than ever before. Especially, support for the construction, strengthening and protection of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels, becomes key to ensuring that the consequences of this pandemic have the least possible impact on the protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens worldwide.