



# ELECTIONS DURING COVID-19

## MITIGATION MEASURES FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA

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## *Introduction*

Albania will hold the parliamentary election in April 25, 2021. Elections in Albania continue to be held in a climate of political standoff and polarisation which undermine public confidence in the legitimacy of their votes. This election will constitute an additional challenge for government and electoral management body as it will be organized under the COVID-19 measures to contain the virus, which have both constitutional and technical implications for the timing and administration of elections all over the world. As of November 23, 2020, there have been 67 countries and 8 territories that have decided to postpone electoral events due to COVID-19.

Electoral processes held under normal circumstances entail a degree of risk to both voters and poll workers. During extraordinary times, such as responding to a new and unfamiliar pandemic, the guidance issued by national public health authorities on the movement of people should inform the decisions taken by governments and electoral management bodies (EMBs) to either postpone or hold an election. Consideration should also be given to the safe conduct of activities throughout the entire electoral cycle (voter registration, staff recruitment and training, candidate nomination, political campaigning, procurement and electoral dispute resolution).

This technical paper aims to provide to the Central Election Commission and other stakeholders involved in the process of elections the best practices of implementing new requirements without compromising the integrity or legitimacy of elections. The document is an additional support of the ASP as part of cooperation for the capacity building of the Central Election Commission's staff under the support of the Council of Europe.

## *Key considerations for planning an election*

### **The constitutional significance of an election**

Elections are held at national, subnational and supranational levels. Some elections are constitutionally or politically critical, serving as a 'mechanism' in a sequence of events, such as a step in a peace process or a legal reform process or in securing a national budget. Some elections require a voter turnout threshold to be reached. For local elections, certain areas of a country may not be as vulnerable to public health threats as other areas, therefore less likely to experience the impact of COVID-19.

### **Alternative mechanisms of campaigning**

Campaign rallies, door-to-door canvassing and town hall meetings are an important part of a vibrant and inclusive democracy. Electoral campaigns are, however, increasingly conducted on the Internet and through social media platforms. This medium offers an alternative option when

electorates and political contestants have their movement restricted or are required to maintain a recommended physical distance between each other.

### **Alternative remote voting methods**

Special voting arrangements that allow citizens to cast their votes remotely (i.e. not in person at a polling station)—by post, or online through a computer or mobile phone application—could mitigate health or security hazards presented by voting in person. However, financial costs may be prohibitive, implementation timeframes may be insufficient for adequate preparation, procurement and training, and legal frameworks may prohibit their introduction. Political distrust may also undermine confidence in any alternatives, while possible threats to the integrity of elections can undermine the feasibility of alternative voting options.

Existing remote voting arrangements are designed to complement, not replace, in person voting at a polling station. Remote voting methods are largely uncontrolled and, in some contexts, known to undermine the integrity of an election. From an electoral management perspective, voting in a polling station is optimal to safeguard the integrity of an election. It reduces the opportunity for irregularities, such as vote buying and coercion or family voting, while guaranteeing the secrecy and integrity of an election. Voting at a polling station can further protect and strengthen the societal value of political engagement that elections provide.

Postal voting typically requires a large-scale logistical effort, from procuring reliable postal services to recruiting ballot-counting staff, and requiring numerous counting officers to cooperate under close supervision. Such an exercise would also be challenging to conduct safely during a viral pandemic, such as COVID-19.

Elections that are held in an area of a country with a greater number of people with an increased health risk, such as older people, remote voting may be an effective option to encourage their participation and maintain voter turnout, while limiting contagion and protecting citizens' and poll workers' health. Proxy voting within a clear legal framework could offer a further option for older people and vulnerable groups to participate in an election without being required to visit a polling station.

Voters will need to be informed about any new voting methods that have been adopted. During a period when citizens' movements are restricted, such as in response to COVID-19 in some countries, a media campaign must be tailored to reach voters through the most popular means of communication used by citizens restricted to their homes. This would include traditional channels, such as national TV and radio, but also the Internet and social media platforms.

### **Will postponing or continuing to hold an election affect its legitimacy?**

The type and constitutional significance of an election, as well as the original date scheduled, will be a factor in the decision to postpone or continue to hold an election. The advantages and

disadvantages of postponing also need to be compared to the advantages and disadvantages of continuing, as holding an election may also see reduced legitimacy.

### **Loss of voice**

Elections are the opportunity for citizens to remove and replace a representative or government. This opportunity is lost for a period of time if an election is postponed.

### **Claims of political opportunism**

Postponement could—and ideally should—be agreed through consensus between all political parties. The risk that incumbent governments may act unilaterally for political advantage, or at least perceived political advantage, should be considered, to avoid undermining confidence in the process and the legitimacy of the result.

### **Effect on turnout**

Democratic elections, at their best, are characterised by high turnout and equal levels of participation across different groups in a society. Without this, the result of an election may be shaped by some groups more than others. Holding an election during a pandemic could undermine, or be perceived as undermining, this aspect of democracy by reducing turnout. Citizens might be less likely to vote if they are concerned for their health and the health of their family members. The legitimacy of the contest may therefore be undermined by uneven participation. Those with underlying health conditions who could be more affected by COVID-19 might be especially less likely to vote. Continuing with elections could therefore make the electoral process less inclusive (James and Garnett 2020).

### **Effect on political debate**

Democratic elections should feature a wide political campaign and broad public debate on public policy issues, which may be curtailed if citizens are restricted from moving freely. Moreover, any election campaign may be dominated by the current pandemic, preventing a comprehensive discussion on wider public policy issues from taking place.

## *Guidelines for operating polling stations during the COVID-19 pandemic*

### **Actions for election officials in advance of election day:**

- Voters should be offered voting methods that minimise direct contact with other people and reduce crowd size at polling stations.
- Postal voting should be encouraged if allowed in the jurisdiction.
- Early voting should be encouraged, to reduce crowds throughout the day.

- Voters planning to vote in person on election day should be encouraged to arrive at off-peak times.

### **Preventive actions polling workers can take for themselves and voters:**

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol. Clearly display instructions inside the polling station.
- Avoid unnecessary handling of voter identification documents.
- Incorporate social distancing strategies, as feasible: more than 1.5 m between voters, and a limited number of voters allowed to enter the polling station at the same time.
- Provide an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60 per cent alcohol for use before and after using the pencil, the voting machine or the final step in the voting process. Consider placing the alcohol-based hand sanitiser in visible, frequently used locations such as registration desks and exits.
- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces with household cleaning spray, including tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, taps and sinks.
- Clean and disinfect voting-associated equipment routinely, such as pencils, voting machines, laptops, tablets and keyboards.

### **Deciding to postpone or continue with holding an election**

Proceeding with an election or postponing an election entails risks for a government, an EMB and health authorities. While postponing elections may be the most feasible and responsible option from the public health perspective, the decision can cause other risks to materialise, for example:

- reputational risks (for an organization that makes decisions, for trust in democratic processes and institutions, for international relations);
- political risks (disturbing the level playing field and undermining the incumbent or opposition);
- financial risks (budgetary implications, e.g. money invested that cannot be recovered);
- operational risks (alternative dates are not feasible because of other risks, e.g. monsoon season, winter, other events); and
- legal risks (the decision can be legally challenged).

## *Best practices of elections conducted during pandemics*

This list focuses on some of the measures election management bodies (EMBs) around the globe are using when holding electoral activities amid COVID-19.

### **Israel General Elections – March 4, 2020**

Israelis under quarantine from the coronavirus voted at separate, tented-off polling locations. Paramedics “dressed in head-to-toe protective gear stood guard” at these designated polling stations, where election officials sat behind sheeted plastic to ensure voting operations went smoothly while staying protected.

### **France Municipal Elections – Round 1 on March 15, 2020**

On March 14, France introduced significant restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19, such as banning gatherings of over 100 people, closing schools and nonessential shops and suspending sporting events. However, France continued to hold local elections on March 15.

Proxy voting is permitted in France. To request proxy voting, voters must apply in person at their respective area’s police station or first-instance tribunal. However, due to COVID-19, specific categories of persons were allowed to request that the police come to them:

- Voters who are in quarantine or confined due to illness;
- Voters who cannot move due to a disease or disability; and
- Voters living in confinement or collective lodging (e.g., a retirement home). The director or an agent of the institution can collect all the applications for proxy voting after he or she has been formally selected by a magistrate or the police. A police officer will then pick them up.

These measures were taken to protect voters and to bolster turnout.

The French government issued guidelines to polling stations recommending that voters remain at least one meter away from each other at all times. The interior minister also “asked voters to bring their own pens, to avoid transmitting the virus that way”. An official communiqué issued by the interior minister before the election on “the organization of municipal elections during the COVID-19 epidemic” included provisions on:

- Polling staff composition and selection process of additional staff in case of sickness;
- Reception of materials prior to Election Day;
- Measures to be taken on Election Day for polling and counting, such as cleaning materials and the physical layout of polling stations; and
- Instructional posters to be affixed outside of stations.

The communiqué also states that any voters who refuse to use disinfectant gel when entering the polling station cannot be denied the right to vote, and that a voter who is sick cannot be denied the right to vote if he or she is wearing a mask and has washed his or her hands. The communiqué does allow the polling station president to remove a voter if he or she disrupts electoral operations by making threats or creating risks related to COVID-19.

BBC reports that in the town of Lamorylay, the polling station featured “metal railings creating closed lanes inside the room, and copious amounts of black-and-yellow striped tape on the floor” to mark where voters must wait in line.

Fear of infection arguably contributed to the historically low voter turnout: dropping from 63.5 percent in 2014 to around 46 percent in 2020.<sup>6</sup> On March 17, President Emanuel Macron announced the delay of the second round of elections, which were to be held on March 22, a decision, he argued, was made to “reconcile public health and democracy.” The government has asked Parliament to extend the current mandate of council members and mayors.

### **Moldova Local Elections in Hâncești – March 15, 2020**

On March 11, the Moldovan Central Election Commission published and submitted a Circular Letter in compliance with the provisions of the NEPHC Decision of 10 March 2020, which involves prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people and requires disinfecting all polling station areas. According to Promo-Lex OM election observers, “electoral bureaus were equipped with the necessary minimum articles used for hygienic purposes.”

### **Zimbabwe Municipal Elections, Chegutu Ward 2 – March 21, 2020**

During the Chegutu War 2 by-elections, Zimbabwe had just one officially recorded case of COVID-19, and President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared the coronavirus pandemic a national disaster. However, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) reported:

“There were no preventative measures put in place for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitizers or water and soap to wash hands. At Rifle Range polling station, one voter refused to place his finger on the table to get his finger marked with an indelible marker citing that it was unhealthy given the COVID-19 scare.”

ZESN recommended that the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) postpone upcoming municipal elections as a precautionary measure. On March 26, the ZEC postponed these additional elections indefinitely.

### **Guinea Parliamentary Elections and Referendum – March 22, 2020**

Guineans voted in a controversial constitutional referendum and for a new Parliament amid protests and election violence. In response to COVID-19, some polling stations required voters to wash their hands before casting their votes, and radio stations reminded citizens to maintain their distance from other voters. However, Reuters reports that the large turnout resulted in

crowds being “squeezed in line to vote.” At the time of the referendum, only two cases of COVID-19 had been recorded in the country.

### **Canada Shoal Lake 39 Council Election – March 26, 2020**

According to reports by APTN, the polling place in Shoal Lake 39 looked “more like a COVID-19 testing center than a place where you cast a ballot for chief and council.” Voters were asked to use hand sanitizer upon entering and leaving the polling station, and “only two voting members were allowed in the station at a time with signs warning them to keep two meters apart.” Voters were handed a ballot through a “cut out slit in plastic just big enough for the envelope,” which served as a protective screen for poll workers.

### **Germany Local Elections in Bavaria – March 15, 2020, and March 29, 2020**

The southern region of Bavaria held first-round local elections on March 15. Election workers wore gloves, and many voters brought their own pens to the polls. The following day, Chancellor Angela Merkel enacted “radical measures” to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder and Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann announced that the March 29 run-off election would only take place by postal vote. Hermann instructed affected municipalities to immediately prepare postal voting materials, and stated that “no separate application for postal voting would be necessary, even if a voter cast his vote in the polling station during the first ballot.” This decision was made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an attempt to minimize the risk of contagion in the region.

### **Mali General Elections – March 29, 2020**

Mali held long-delayed parliamentary elections on March 29, after President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita assured the country that a “scrupulous respect of health measures” would be observed.<sup>17</sup> Reuters reported that turnout in the capital appeared low in the morning. Lines were short, allowing voters to cast their ballots while maintaining distance from other voters. Handwashing facilities were meant to be available, but kits arrived late.

### **Australia Local Elections in Queensland – March 29, 2020**

In Australia, the New South Wales government delayed its local government elections. However, the Queensland Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) decided to continue with its scheduled elections.<sup>19</sup> Voting is compulsory in Australia and a \$133 fine can be imposed on violators, a regulation that was not amended in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ECQ came to this decision:

“On the basis that: the elections facilitate an essential service by providing for continuity of democratic representation for Queenslanders; and measures will be put in place at polling places to limit the number of people inside the building to fewer than 100.”



The ECQ published a list of COVID-19 protection measures and resources ahead of the election, including:

- Providing hand sanitizer;
- Additional cleaning of polling booth areas;
- Maintaining distances of 1.5 meters;
- Eliminating “how-to-vote” handouts and the physical distribution of other materials;
- Encouraging voters to bring their own pens or pencils with them to vote;
- Encouraging early voting between March 16-27;
- Employing additional staff to assist with managing lines; and
- Limiting the number of people at polling stations to no more than 100.

The ECQ instituted a telephone voting system for a limited number of at-risk voters. However, this service was beset by issues as a reported 19,000 voters had registered for this service. Mail-in voting was permitted; however the deadline to request a mail-in ballot was March 16.

### **South Korea Parliamentary Elections – April 15, 2020**

The National Election Commission (NEC) had to urgently devise safeguarding measures against COVID-19. In addition to mandatory masks and gloves, voters were checked for temperature and sprayed with hand sanitizer when they showed up to cast ballots.<sup>22</sup> Some confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients were allowed to vote from home or hospitals via mail-in or absentee ballots.<sup>23</sup> The NEC confirmed that 14,330 polling stations would be set up for the elections to increase voters’ access to polling stations.

In addition, a voter code of conduct was established. Banners were placed around the country to inform voters of the measures that will be put in place in polling stations, and the information was posted inside polling stations. The Code of Conduct has five key parts:

1. Voters should wear masks and must have their temperature checked on entry to the polling station. If there is a line to enter, voters should stand one meter apart.
2. Any voter with a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius or displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should follow polling station staff and vote at temporarily installed polling booths.
3. Voters should then wash their hands with hand sanitizer and wear the vinyl gloves provided. Voters should then be ready with their ID.
4. Voters may then enter the polling station and vote. At the identification stage, the voter should either temporarily lower or take off his or her mask for clear identification.

5. When leaving the polling booth, the voters should remove their gloves and place them in the used bin at the exit.

The government allowed voters who have been in self-isolation to still participate in person in a way that did not overlap with other voters. The government sent text messages to self-isolators “asking about their willingness to vote Monday and Tuesday” and to reply “by 6 p.m. on the day that they receive the message” to allow the government to make arrangements. These voters, wearing face masks, waited at designated places before being guided to makeshift polling places at 6:00 p.m., after voting had ended. They were only allowed outside from the hours of 5:20-7:00 p.m. Officials then immediately disinfected ballot stamps and polling booths.

The NEC closed polling stations in 40 countries with major COVID-19 outbreaks, such as the United States, Italy and Germany. These eligible voters were not able to vote, as South Korea does not allow mail ballots for those overseas. This impacts more than 87,000 citizens, or about half of eligible voters living outside of South Korea.

While the NEC suspended the International Election Observation Program for the elections, they announced that individuals would be able to observe the election remotely. Observers could watch early voting and counting on Election Day live on YouTube. The elections livestreaming schedule can be found [here](#). The NEC will also be producing a summary video of the election, scheduled to be posted on May 1.

The NEC published various videos and images that explain the voting process for both voters and the media covering this election as part of a larger public information campaign.

### **Benin Local Elections – May 17, 2020**

Benin held local elections on May 17 – a date that has been set since January 22, 2019. The following measures were observed during the election:

- Social distancing;
- Health protection equipment for voters (masks, handwashing gel and soap);
- Electoral agents provided with protective equipment;
- Election campaign conducted solely through the media, with no rallies or gatherings, and carried out with vehicles equipped with megaphones;
- Media campaign supervised by the High Authority for Audio-visual and Communication; and
- Political parties subsidized by the state for this media campaign.

The Autonomous National Electoral Commission carried out an awareness campaign to assure voters that they could safely participate in the election.

### **Burundi General Elections – May 20, 2020**

Burundi held general elections on May 20 to elect its president, national legislators and local representatives. The country has faced criticism for its handling of the virus. The week before the election, Burundi kicked out the World Health Organization's (WHO) top official in the country after the WHO raised concerns about crowded political rallies. On Election Day, regional observers were absent after being told that arriving foreigners would face a 14-day quarantine.

### **Suriname General Elections - May 25, 2020**

In Suriname, authorities lifted a partial coronavirus lockdown to allow voters to visit the polls on Election Day. However "a ban on public transportation remained in place, meaning people in rural areas had difficulties getting to vote." Voters maintained a 1.5-meter distance at polling stations, and officials "dabbed blue ink on the voters' fingers with an ear swab" instead of allowing voters to dip their fingers in shared ink. In addition, a separate polling station was designated to allow 187 voters in quarantine to participate in the election.

### **Serbia Parliamentary Elections – June 21, 2020**

On May 6, the country's state of emergency declaration was lifted, including decreasing the limits on gathering from 100 to 500 people, which led to the resumption of some campaign activities. The Republic Electoral Commission requested that, on Election Day, all poll workers wear masks and gloves, disinfect their hands often, keep the polling stations well ventilated and maintain a distance of at least one meter from other poll workers, observers and voters. Poll workers were required to monitor voters to ensure they wore masks and kept a distance of at least one meter between one another. All polling stations across Serbia were required to display posters with instructions for poll workers and voters. A public service announcement video and radio message aired in the days leading up to June 21 to inform voters of their responsibilities in protecting themselves and others against COVID-19.

### **Mongolia Parliamentary Elections – June 24, 2020**

In March, Mongolian President Khaltmaa Battulga called for a postponement of the elections, citing the economic risks, and asked citizens to vote on this matter by visiting his official website.<sup>37</sup> However, elections proceeded on June 24. On April 28, the Election Commission released precautionary measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus during the nomination of parties and coalitions in the 2020 parliamentary elections. These precautions included physical distancing requirements, sanitization and readings of body temperature.

### **French Municipal Elections – Round 2 on June 28, 2020**

France held the second round of municipal elections on June 28, following the first-round vote on March 15, 2020. A law was adopted and published June 22, 2020, that provided for specific measures for the conduct of the second round of the municipal elections. The rules of proxy voting were lightened due to COVID-19:

- A person could carry up to two proxy votes instead of one, as was the protocol in the March elections. The proxy voting measure was adopted based on the recommendation by the Scientific Council published in May.
- Vulnerable persons or voters confined due to COVID-19 who could not go to the office to establish a proxy vote could request that an agent (police officer or person duly authorized) come to their place of confinement.

Masks were provided for voters and members of the polling station. The law also provided that targeted postponement of elections could take place in areas where the health situation worsened before Election Day. The French government could decide to postpone up to the eve of the polls and be ordered by decree during the Council of Ministers following an advisory opinion from the Scientific Council. These cancellations could not be ordered for more than 5 percent of the 4,855 communes holding elections for the second round. After this threshold of 242 communes, the entire second round election would be cancelled. Voter education posters and social distancing guidance were displayed at polling stations.

#### **Poland Presidential Election – Round 1 on June 28, 2020, Round 2 on July 9, 2020**

The National Election Commission (NEC) issued the following guidance in advance of the presidential election:

- Voters could vote in person on June 28 or by mail up to 12 days prior to the election if in self-isolation or quarantine.
- Poll workers would receive FFP1 masks and gloves, which were to be changed every hour.
- Poll workers must be at least 1.5 meters apart, and each of their stations would be covered with a barrier at least one meter above the “breathing zone.”
- Poll workers and voters would be provided with hand sanitizer upon entering the polling stations.
- Polling stations would be aired out at least every hour for 10 minutes.
- All high-touch surfaces would be disinfected every hour.
- Based on the size of the electoral precinct, a maximum of one person would be allowed per 15 square meters.

In addition, the NEC issued guidelines for participation for voters in mandatory quarantine or isolation on Election Day. Such voters must have announced their intention to vote by mail by July 10, at the latest, and would be mailed an election package.

### **Malawi Presidential Rerun Election – July 2, 2020**

Prior to the election, the Malawi Election Commission (MEC) announced that there would be “masks, gloves, water and hand sanitizers for use” throughout polling places. Further, there would be “strict observance of distances between individuals as well as gatherings of less than 100 people during meetings.” The Election Commission experienced difficulties acquiring election materials, as Malawi imports many election materials from other countries. Country lockdowns impacted election preparations, as the MEC procures Election Day supplies from both local and international suppliers, with some suppliers finding it difficult to transport goods internationally.

To mitigate COVID-19 risk, the MEC:

- Appealed to political parties to find innovative ways of campaigning that would not expose voters to COVID-19;
- Developed COVID-19 procedures and guidelines;
- Distributed masks, sanitizers and hand-washing liquid to polling staff to ensure that they would be well protected;
- Enforced social distancing during voting;
- Enforced hand-washing when voters arrived at the polling stations; and
- Raised awareness of COVID-19 through social media and radio messages.

### **Dominican Republic General Elections – July 5, 2020**

On May 26, the Central Electoral Board (JCE) approved a sanitary protocol for poll workers, political parties, electoral police and voters. The protocol acknowledges that the 2020 general elections would be taking place in the context of a pandemic and, as such, require special, practical measures that have not customarily been part of past elections.<sup>45</sup> Important and significant adaptations to the conduct of the elections include the use of personal protective equipment by poll workers and voters, the spacing of polling stations and the institution of social distancing outside polling areas.<sup>46</sup> This includes the mandatory use of face masks, social distancing and disinfection of all identification cards, markers and ballots cards.<sup>47</sup>

### **Croatia Parliamentary Elections – July 5, 2020<sup>48</sup>**

The State Electoral Commission (SEC) worked with the Croatian Institute for Public Health (CIPH) to develop and issue recommendations for election administrators, participants and voters to protect their health throughout the electoral process.

The SEC and CIPH prepared and issued instructions for Election Day itself, focused on ensuring the safety of voters, election administrators, observers and others present on Election Day, such as media representatives. Instructions and recommendations were established for standard

polling stations and special polling stations at social welfare institutions – such as temporary housing, assisted living communities and mental health facilities.

Some of these instructions included:

- Poll workers and observers must wear face masks while at polling stations, and voters are advised to wear them.
- Gloves are required for poll workers performing voter identification and recommended for all poll workers. Gloves should be disinfected and changed regularly.
- Soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer for hand disinfecting will be provided.
- Polling station windows must be open to provide regular ventilation.
- A distance of 1.5 meters must be maintained between voting screens, poll workers, observers and voters waiting in queues or walking through the polling station.
- Hand sanitizer should be placed at the entrance of rooms, and a designated poll worker must apply it to voters and others entering and exiting the room.
- Commonly trafficked surfaces should be disinfected regularly.
- Poll workers traveling to voters' residence due to illness, disability or self-isolation must wear masks as well as gloves, which must be disinfected before and after each visit and changed after 10 visits.
- During vote counting, observers must maintain a distance of two meters from the vote counting location, and polling station committee members performing this function must be 1.5 meters apart and disinfect their hands at each stage of the process.<sup>50</sup>

The SEC has also allowed voters in self-isolation to request to vote at their residence, much like the process afforded to voters with disabilities. Voters in self-isolation must have requested this measure from their local election commission by July 2, 2020.

Technical Instruction of the State Election Commissions Prepared in Cooperation with the Croatian Institute of Public Health: Voting on Election Day and Ensuring Epidemiological Protection of All Participants at Polling Stations, June 29, 2020.

### **Singapore Parliamentary Elections – July 10, 2020**

The Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Act outlined preventative safety measures at polling places in advance of the election. Voters were expected to spend no more than five minutes in the polling station, scan their identity cards, sanitize their hands and wear disposable gloves before handling their ballot paper. Wearing masks in public is compulsory in Singapore.

Although voting is required in Singapore, voters under quarantine or stay-at home orders or who were given medical certificates for acute respiratory infections were excused from voting. In addition, voters on stay-at-home protocols outside their electoral divisions were given special permission to vote outside their normal precincts. Election candidates who were unable to file their nomination papers due to COVID-19 could also exercise their power of attorney and authorize a representative to act on their behalf.

Polls were open from 8:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m. on Election Day; the end time was extended by two hours to account for long lines. Every voter was assigned a two-hour window for voting to avoid crowds at the polls. Voters 65 years and older were granted the opportunity to vote first. In addition, the number of polling stations was increased from 880 to 1,100. Cleaners regularly cleaned common touch points, including booths and self-inking "X" pens used for voting.

### **North Macedonia Parliamentary Elections – July 15, 2020**

Parliamentary elections were delayed from April 12, after the North Macedonia Parliament was dissolved on February 16, 2020. On June 15, 2020, the government adopted Decree No. 44-5638/1 to continue the process of organizing the elections. Other government decrees related to health protocols were issued to regulate the election process and provide guidance on protective health measures.

Voters with confirmed cases of COVID-19 or who were in self-isolation were able to vote after registering through an authorized representative by July 8, 2020. These citizens then voted on July 13, two days before the official Election Day.<sup>58</sup> Members of the Special Electoral Boards (SEBs) visited each voter and changed their personal protective equipment after visiting each household.

On Election Day, before the start of voting, every polling station was required to be cleaned and disinfected. Posters for both voter education and protection were required to be displayed at each polling station. Other regulations included:

- Voters were required to maintain a distance of 1.5 to two meters from one another.
- Voters were required to wear a mask and disinfect their hands when entering and exiting the polling station.
- Voters were allowed to briefly take off their masks after providing their personal document for identification to identify themselves.
- Polling officers were to remain one to 1.5 meters from one another.
- All members of the Electoral Boards were required to wear a face mask and gloves, and masks were to be changed every four hours and the gloves after restroom and lunch breaks.

### **Sri Lanka Parliamentary Elections – August 5, 2020**

Legislative elections were postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In July, the Sri Lankan government issued strict health guidelines regarding election campaigning, including requiring face masks, establishing social distancing guidelines of one meter, ensuring accessible hand-washing stations and limiting attendance to 300 people for normal rallies and 500 people for rallies with party leaders. In addition, the guidelines called for a minimum number of voters at polling stations with separate entry and exit points and providing personal protective equipment to election officers.<sup>61</sup> In preparation for Election Day, the Electoral Commission held mock polls in four constituencies “to ensure the proper functioning of coronavirus-safe protocol.”<sup>62</sup> The Electoral Commission extended the duration of polling for people under quarantine orders who had obtained approval from the Ministry of Health.

### **Libya Municipal Elections – August 14-October 2020**

Due to the emergence of COVID-19 in Libya, the Committee on Coronavirus, under the direction of the Presidential Council, was authorized to determine the election date based on public safety considerations. As a result, the start of local elections initially planned for April 2020 was delayed several times. The Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE) developed new procedures, procured personal protective equipment (PPE) and sprayable anti-fraud voter ink, adapted its voter education messaging and added polling stations to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure for voters, observers, agents, candidates and polling staff.

Polling staff will wear PPE such as gloves, masks and visors to minimize the spread of virus. Voters will have their temperature checked prior to entering a polling center. The number of voters per polling station will be decreased and a distance of 1.6 meters will be enforced for voters during queueing and voting. Instead of dipping voters’ fingers into ink before voting, polling staff will use a spray bottle to apply an indelible ink sensitive to ultraviolet light. Each voter will be given his or her own pen. Hand sanitizer will be provided for voters and polling staff. The polling station layout will also be rearranged to minimize voters’ contact with curtains, doorknobs, desks and other surfaces. These surfaces and the objects in the polling station will be frequently disinfected.

In addition to precautions on Election Day, the CCMCE has issued a number of public service announcements providing information about COVID-19 and encouraging voters to wear PPE and not to go to polling stations if they are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. Voters in self-isolation or quarantine due to COVID-19 will not be able to vote. The CCMCE provided video trainings for poll workers on the steps that must be followed during the electoral process to avoid spreading the virus.

### **Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections – October 4, 2020**

On September 1, 2020, President Jeenbekov held a meeting of the Security Council about preparation for the parliamentary elections. Following the meeting, the Central Election Commission (CEC), in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Emergency



Situations of Kyrgyzstan, recommended a number of measures to safeguard elections and voters.<sup>67</sup> In particular, by September 25, 2020, the government of Kyrgyzstan agreed to:

- Provide all members of election commissions, independent observers and other persons involved in the work of polling stations with personal protective equipment (medical masks, gloves, face shields) and, if necessary, with protective suits, including those who will work with voters at home.
- Train the above-mentioned persons on the rules of compliance with sanitary and epidemiological safety requirements when coming into contact with voters and processing ballots.
- Equip all polling stations with disinfectants and noncontact thermometers, as well as install information boards about the rules of social distancing that explain the need to comply with sanitary and epidemiological standards and requirements.
- Organize the polling stations in compliance with the rules of social distancing, including the location of ballot boxes, voting booths and workplaces for members of election commissions.
- Organize disinfection of all polling stations on Election Day.

#### **Czech Republic Senate and Municipal Elections – October 2 and 3, 2020, and October 9 and 10, 2020**

Ahead of the election, the government of the Czech Republic introduced three alternative voting methods for people who are in self-isolation or quarantine. The law allowed people in medically imposed quarantine to vote from their vehicles in 78 designated places, request to vote at their residence via a mobile ballot box delivered by a special election commission, or, for those in quarantine at social and medical facilities, to cast their vote via a mobile ballot box delivered by a special election commission. The Chamber of Deputies included an explicit provision according to which participating in the elections will not be a violation of an imposed quarantine. The possibility of a special vote applied only to people who are placed in an imposed quarantine or self-isolation by a sanitary station or doctor by the time of the election.

The State Electoral Commission issued the following basic guidelines for voters casting their ballots in person:

- A face covering for the nose and mouth is required for the duration of one's time spent at the polling station, except for when required for identification purposes;
- Voters must use hand disinfectants provided in polling stations;
- People entering polling stations must follow social distancing protocols as instructed by polling station workers;

- Voters are encouraged to use their own marking devices (pens) to mark ballots, although marking implements will be provided by the district election commissions and disinfected frequently; and
- Voters must follow general instructions from the district election commissions.

### **Tajikistan Presidential Election – October 11, 2020**

The Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) reported that it took all necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the election, and indicated they enabled Precinct Election Commissions to adhere to all hygiene and sanitary norms. To that end, each Precinct Election Commission was supplied with antiseptics for cleaning on Election Day; check-in tables staffed by polling officials were located at a certain distance from one another; and voters and observers were required to maintain strict social distancing while they are in the polling stations. The CCER required masks in the polling stations and provided hand sanitizer or spray to all polling stations. There was not a directive to take voters' temperatures upon entering the polling station, however.

### **New Zealand General Elections and Referendums – October 17, 2020**

Ahead of the general elections, the New Zealand Electoral Commission enacted additional measures to safeguard the health of voters and election officials. The commission created a COVID-19 and the 2020 General Election page on its website to post information and updates. It outlined contingency planning efforts, alternative voting methods and how the election date could change.

The commission established a range of measures to keep voters safe, including contact tracing, using hand sanitizer on the way in and out of voting places, managing queues and allowing more room for physical distancing inside voting places. In addition, the commission increased the size and number of voting places to give everyone more space. Voters in isolation or quarantine were able to vote using a telephone dictation service.

### **United States – Presidential Primary Elections**

As the coronavirus spreads across the U.S., many states have postponed primary elections and expanded vote-by-mail options. Other states have continued to hold in-person elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic, taking various measures to safeguard the health of voters and election workers.<sup>79</sup>

- Alaska: The Alaska Democratic Party canceled all in-person voting for the presidential primary and will instead expand voting by mail. The party extended the deadline to receive ballots to April 10 from March 24, and has made voter registration documents and ranked-choice paper ballots available to download on its website.
- Arizona: The state held its presidential primary election, for the Democratic Party only, on March 17. Maricopa County, the state's most populous county, cut around 80 polling locations

after the locations closed or poll workers canceled their shifts. Voters were free to vote at any of the county's remaining 151 polling locations, not just the location nearest to their residence. Despite the challenges, voter turnout for day-of voting was higher than that for the 2016 Democratic primary election.

- Delaware: Governor John Carney issued an order expanding absentee ballot voting opportunities to all voters concerned about the coronavirus.
- Florida: The state held its presidential primary election on March 17. Prior to the election, officials moved voting locations from areas where vulnerable populations live, such as assisted living facilities, to other public locations, such as community centers. The populous Miami-Dade County "kept six precincts at senior facilities so voters who live there can vote on site." However, all other voters assigned to those precincts had to vote at reassigned locations. During Election Day, officials provided hand sanitizer, clean voting equipment and additional safety training to poll workers.
- Hawaii: The Democratic Party has suspended all in-person voting and will instead be voting entirely by mail.
- Illinois: On March 13, the Illinois State Board of Elections and the Illinois Department of Public Health has issued a three-page guidance document. The guidance outlines preventative actions for: election polling locations – such as routinely cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and electronics associated with voting – poll workers, the general public and vulnerable populations. The state held its presidential primary election on March 17. Early voting hours in many areas were extended; for example, the Chicago Board of Elections extended hours for the Friday, Saturday and Sunday before Tuesday's election. In Chicago, 168 of 2,069 polling places were moved from senior living facilities, and voters were urged to continually check the city's Board of Elections website to locate their polling place. Further, in response to many poll workers and election judges canceling their shifts, the Cook County Clerk's Office posted that it was "waving all training requirements" for applicants who wanted to serve as election judges.
- Maryland: A special by-election in one Maryland congressional district will be held on April 28 entirely by mail.
- New Hampshire: Governor Chris Sununu announced on April 9 that the state will allow voters to cast mail-in ballots in the November general election if the coronavirus is still widespread. The state is also considering other voting alternatives, including "drive-up voting."
- New York: Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the state would move its presidential primary elections from April 28 to June 23. On April 8, Cuomo issued an executive order that would allow all New Yorkers to vote from home.
- Ohio: The state has moved its presidential primary election from March 17 to April 28 and will conduct the election almost entirely by mail. All registered voters will receive postcards with

ballot application instructions. Voters with disabilities or who do not have a permanent address will be allowed to vote in person at their local elections board.

- Pennsylvania: The state recently enacted amendments to the Pennsylvania Election Code. All legal voters can now vote by mail, and the county boards of election may consolidate polling places “so long as the reduction does not result in more than a 60% reduction of polling places in the county.”
- Rhode Island: The presidential primary election was postponed from April 28 to June 2, and the election will primarily take place by mail ballot. The state will send all registered voters a mail ballot application with a postage-paid return envelope.
- West Virginia: The state postponed its election from May 12 to June 9 and extended the deadline to obtain an absentee ballot.
- Wyoming: The Democratic Party has suspended its in-person presidential primary caucuses. Ballots will be mailed to all registered Democratic voters.

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