Elections Held and Mitigating Measures Taken During COVID-19 – As of April 17, 2020

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Mitigating Measures During Recent Elections

This list focuses on some of the measures election management bodies (EMBs) around the globe are using when holding electoral activities amid COVID-19. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has not analyzed these mitigating measures for their effectiveness or desirability. Please contact IFES at ElectionGuide@ifes.org if you know of additional mitigating measures or believe any data in this resource to be inaccurate.

Israeli 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.¹

French Municipal Elections – 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”\(^2\). An official communiqué issued by the interior minister before the election on “the organization of municipal elections during the COVID-19 epidemic”\(^3\) 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.\(^4\)

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”\(^5\) 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.\(^6\) 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.”\(^7\). The government has asked Parliament to extend the current mandate of council members and mayors.\(^8\)

**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

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\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.


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.

9 [https://a.cec.md/storage/ckfinder/files/APN_H%C3%AEnce%C8%99ti%20nr.%2038/Circulare/2068.pdf](https://a.cec.md/storage/ckfinder/files/APN_H%C3%AEnce%C8%99ti%20nr.%2038/Circulare/2068.pdf)
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.15

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. Herrmann 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.”16 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.17 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 late18.

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.19 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.”20

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

- Providing hand sanitizer;

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15 https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/17/germany-pulls-out-the-bazooka-against-the-coronavirus-but-is-it-doing-enough/
18 https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN21G0H4-OZATP
• 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. Some confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients were allowed to vote from home or hospitals via mail-in or absentee ballots. 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.

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The NEC committed to cleaning all polling stations prior to opening and will thereafter disinfect polling places at regular intervals during Election Day. The NEC tested out these quarantine steps at over 3,500 polling locations during early voting.25

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.26 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.27 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.28 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 1.29

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.

**Upcoming Elections**

**Poland Presidential Election – May 10, 2020**

On April 6, Polish lawmakers voted to conduct the upcoming presidential election exclusively through postal voting.30 The country will not open any physical polling stations; rather voters will deposit their ballots in special post boxes in their local areas.31 Previously, only Polish citizens over the age of 75 or those with certain medical conditions were eligible to vote by mail.

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

25 https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200413002000315
27 Ibid.
29 https://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/07_inact/07_04.jsp
The Malawi Election Commission (MEC) has announced that there will be “masks, gloves, water and hand sanitizers for use” throughout polling places. Further, there will be strict observance of distances between individuals as well as gatherings of less than 100 people during meetings.\(^{32}\)

The MEC has indicated that compliance with the election calendar will depend on the impact of the pandemic on processes – travel embargoes and shutdown of companies producing electoral material – and further measures needed to mitigate the spread of the virus.

**New Zealand General Election and Referendums – September 19, 2020**

The New Zealand Electoral Commission is continuing with its preparations for the September election and referendums while looking at additional measures to safeguard the health of voters and election officials if the COVID-19 pandemic is still a risk. The commission has created a [COVID-19 and the 2020 General Election](https://vote.nz/elections-and-more/all-events/2020/2020-general-election/covid-19-and-the-2020-general-election/) page on its website to post information and updates. It outlines contingency planning efforts, existing alternative voting methods and how the election date could change. Further, the commission has committed to informing voters if any changes are made via their website, social media channels and in their election advertising.\(^ {33}\)

**Singapore General Elections – April 14, 2021**

The Elections Department announced special provisions as part of contingency planning for the 2021 general elections, if held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Voters who are under COVID-19 stay orders will be able to vote outside of their electoral divisions, and “aspiring candidates may also authorize a representative to file their nomination paper on his behalf, if they are on a COVID-19 quarantine order or stay order, hospitalized or ill.”\(^ {34}\) The bill is expected to be debated at its second reading during the next Parliament sitting.

**Other Mitigating Measures**

**Pakistan**

On March 23, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) postponed the April by-elections to vacant Provincial Assembly seats due to the COVID-19 crisis.\(^ {35}\) According to a directive issued by the chief election commissioner on March 24, the ECP has taken additional steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19:\(^ {36}\)

1) All women ECP staff across Pakistan are allowed to stay at home until April 6.
2) While all other offices in the Secretariat will remain open, the Gender, Training and Protocol departments are closed until April 6.

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\(^{32}\) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UGuQE1OrxCBkrFEhHcqx0-epm8CMQOn/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UGuQE1OrxCBkrFEhHcqx0-epm8CMQOn/view?usp=sharing)


3) Fifty percent of the ECP’s Secretariat staff can be in the office at one time (March 25-April 6).
4) Fifty percent of the ECP’s security staff can be in the office on a rotating basis (March 25-April 6).
5) All ECP offices’ hours will be 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (March 25-April 6).
6) ECP officials – Secretariat, provinces, districts – will not leave their duty stations without the ECP’s approval and will make themselves available to support to government departments handling the coronavirus crisis, if required.
7) ECP will extend its full support to any its staff who might get infected with the virus.
8) Any visitors to ECP offices, if they must visit to attend to an urgent matter, will be hosted in a specific area and will not be permitted to enter any other offices.

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.37

- **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.38 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.39 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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40 [https://www.elections.il.gov/Main/NewsDetail.aspx?ID=pvRMxGVvie4%3d&T=637224720079780090](https://www.elections.il.gov/Main/NewsDetail.aspx?ID=pvRMxGVvie4%3d&T=637224720079780090)