

Young people's trust in government damaged long-term by COVID-19

June 22 2020, by Neil Vowles



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Generation Z are likely to have less faith in elections and their own governments for the rest of their lives as a result of their experiences growing up during the coronavirus pandemic, a new study shows.

The research indicates that individuals who experience an epidemic outbreak in their 'impressionable years' (between the ages of 18-25) are less likely to have confidence in political institutions and leaders and harbor more negative attitudes towards elections.

The findings were revealed in a new working paper, "The Political Scar of Epidemics," published by the Systemic Risk Center at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Data for the paper was compiled using responses to the 2006-2018 Gallup World Polls and data on the incidence of epidemics since 1970. The data included responses from 750,000 respondents from 142 countries.

The responses revealed that an individual with the highest exposure to an epidemic, is 7.2 percentage points less likely to have confidence in the honesty of elections; 5.1 percentage points less likely to have confidence in the [national government](#); and 6.2 percentage points less likely to approve the performance of the political leader in the remainder of their lives.

The [negative impact](#) on [trust](#) in political institutions and governments was most marked in democracies, with less effect seen in autocracies. Governments that are perceived to be 'weaker' at the time of an outbreak are also more likely to experience a more pronounced fall in [public trust](#).

Paper co-author Dr. Orkun Saka, Assistant Professor at the University of Sussex and Visiting Fellow at LSE said: "Trust and confidence in [government](#) are important for the capacity of a society to organize an effective collective response to an epidemic. Yet there is also the possibility that experiencing an epidemic can negatively affect an individual's [confidence](#) in [political institutions](#) and trust in political leaders, with negative implications for this collective capacity."

Dr. Saka adds, "We have shown that this negative effect is large and persistent. Its largest and most enduring impact is on the attitudes of individuals who are in their impressionable late-adolescent and early-adult years when an epidemic breaks out."

Those aged 18-25 are described as being in their "impressionable years" – a period of life, psychological studies have suggested, when value systems and opinions are durably formed.

The authors note that worryingly, a decline in trust can impact on a government's ability to respond to crises in the future.

Dr. Saka said: "The implications of our findings are disturbing. Imagine that more trust in government is important for effective containment, but that failure of containment harms trust in government. One can envisage a scenario where low levels of trust allow an epidemic to spread, and where the spread of the [epidemic](#) reduces trust in government still further, hindering the ability of the authorities to contain future epidemics and address other social problems."

More information: Aksoy et al., The Political Scar of Epidemics, (2020). [cepr.org/active/publications/d...rs/dp.php?dpno=14879](https://cepr.org/active/publications/documents/dpno=14879)

Provided by University of Sussex

Citation: Young people's trust in government damaged long-term by COVID-19 (2020, June 22) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-06-young-people-long-term-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.