

As many state of emergency declarations during the first wave of the pandemic as in the preceding decade

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In 2020, as many states of emergency were declared around the world during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic as there were in the entire previous decade. The influence of neighboring countries on each other, weak democracies and poor pandemic preparedness are some of the explanations, according to research from the University of Gothenburg and Stockholm University.

A state of emergency is a situation in which a country's ordinary laws

and rights are suspended and authorities are given increased powers. A state of emergency is declared by the government of a country, often as a result of war, civil unrest or natural disasters. The introduction of a curfew is a common measure in a state of emergency.

Previous research has explained why countries declare a state of emergency. However, for the first time, researchers have now focused on the states of emergency declared in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world in the spring and summer of 2020.

Half of the world's countries

Approximately half of the world's countries declared some form of state of emergency for brief or extended periods.

"The total number of states of emergency in the first half of 2020 is comparable to the total number of states of emergency declared between 2010 and 2019, so it is a big number. The areas that stand out are Latin America, Southern Europe and parts of Africa, which had a particularly large share of these states of emergency," says Magnus Lundgren, senior lecturer in political science.

Together with his research colleagues at Stockholm University, he has studied which factors made it more or less likely for a country to declare a state of emergency during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results are based on a statistical survey of 180 countries in the period from January to June 2020.

"We identified three main patterns relating to the influence of neighboring countries, the degree of democracy and [pandemic preparedness](#)."

Firstly, it was more likely for countries to declare a state of emergency if

other countries in the same region had already done so. Secondly, states of emergency were more common among countries with weak democratic systems, compared with countries with strong democratic systems and countries with non-democratic systems. Finally, countries with stronger pandemic preparedness were less prone to declaring a state of emergency.

Might have been abused

The pandemic has put considerable pressure on society and governments have opted for various measures. A state of emergency can provide governments with greater opportunities to fight a pandemic, however, they often lead to significant curtailment of civil liberties.

"Our research can help us to understand how different countries have tried to stop the pandemic. Although not the subject of direct analysis in our study, the results can potentially help us understand whether and to what extent a [state of emergency](#) has been abused by governments to promote political goals that have nothing to do with the [pandemic](#)," says Mark Klamberg, professor of international law at Stockholm University.

More information: Magnus Lundgren et al, Emergency Powers in Response to COVID-19: Policy Diffusion, Democracy, and Preparedness, *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/18918131.2021.1899406](https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2021.1899406)

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