Council of Europe Venice Commission
18th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies
29 October 2021, Online

The impact of COVID-19 on elections: rethinking voter participation

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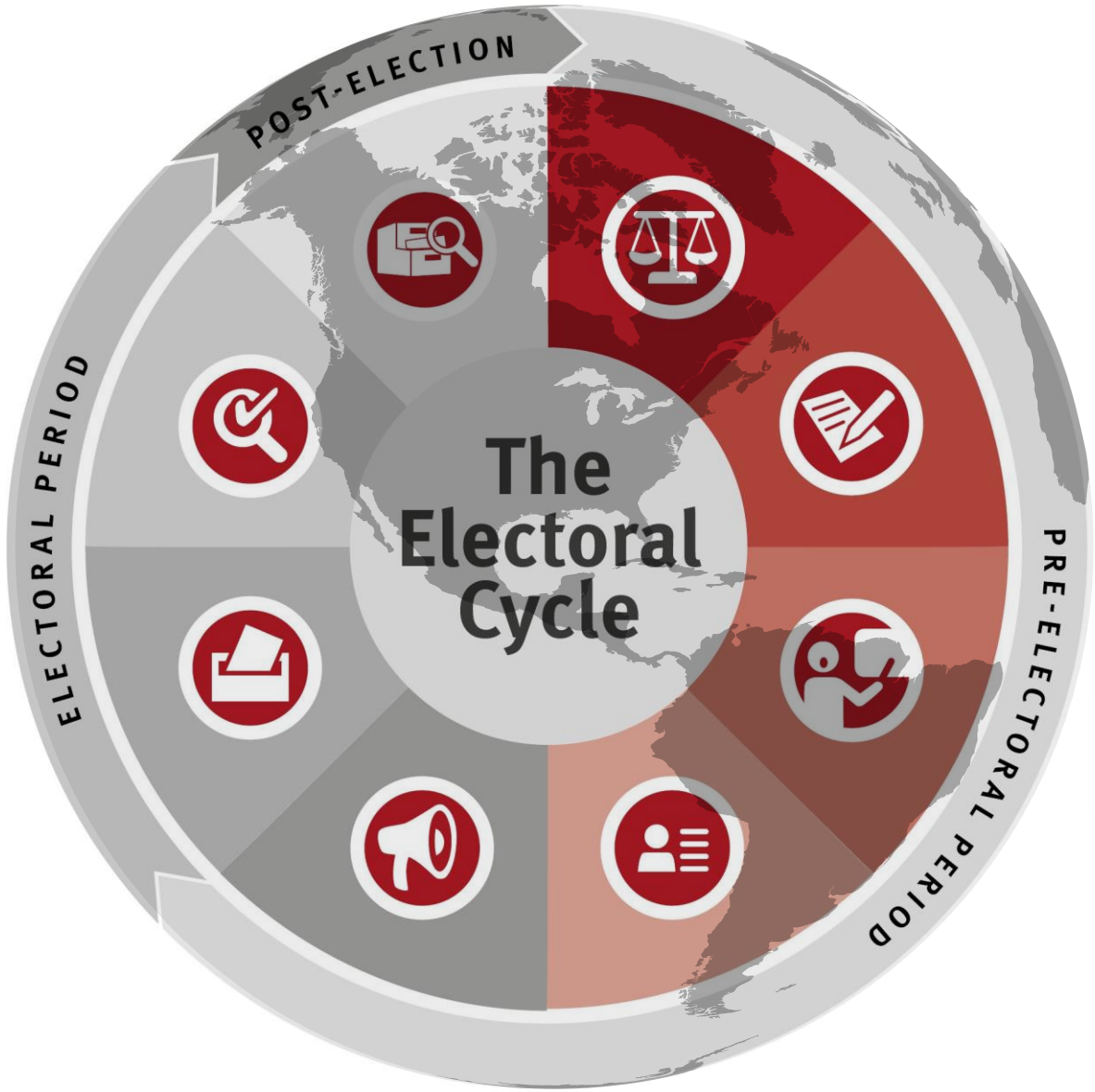
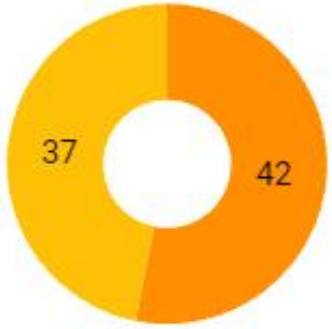
During 2020 and 2021, COVID19 has impacted

the entire electoral cycle and all the actors involved in elections.



National and Subnational Elections Postponed

Go To Page 2



Click on the chart for more information
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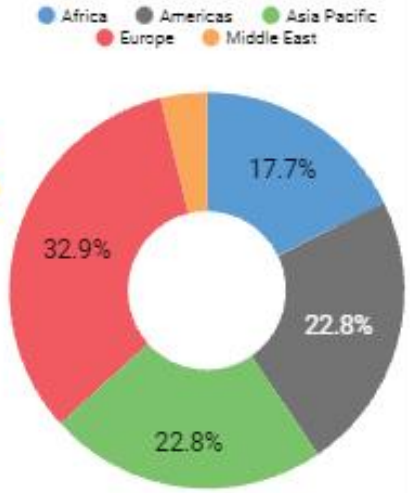
Elections Postponed in
79
Countries and Territories



Click on the chart for more information
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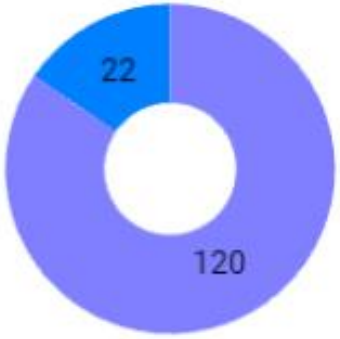
National and Subnational Elections Held



Click on the chart for more information
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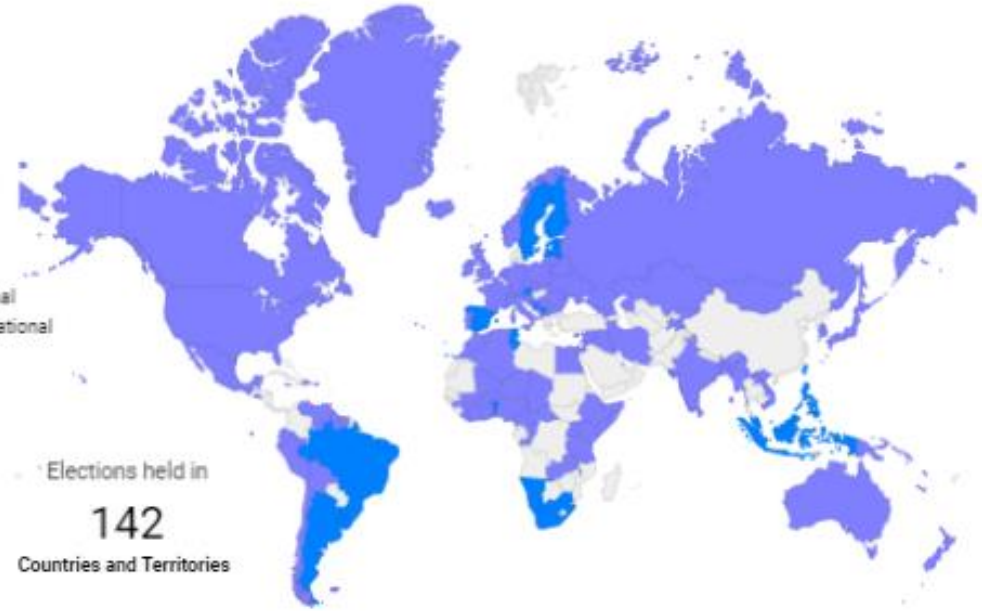
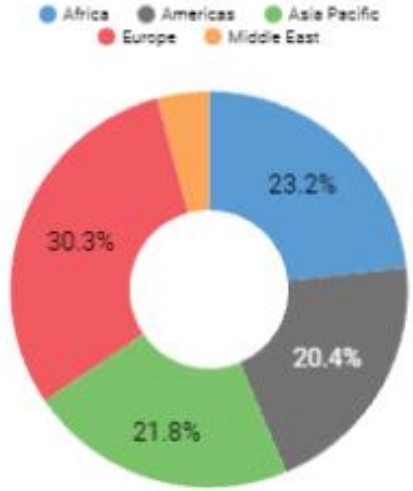


Elections held in
142
Countries and Territories



Click on the chart for more information
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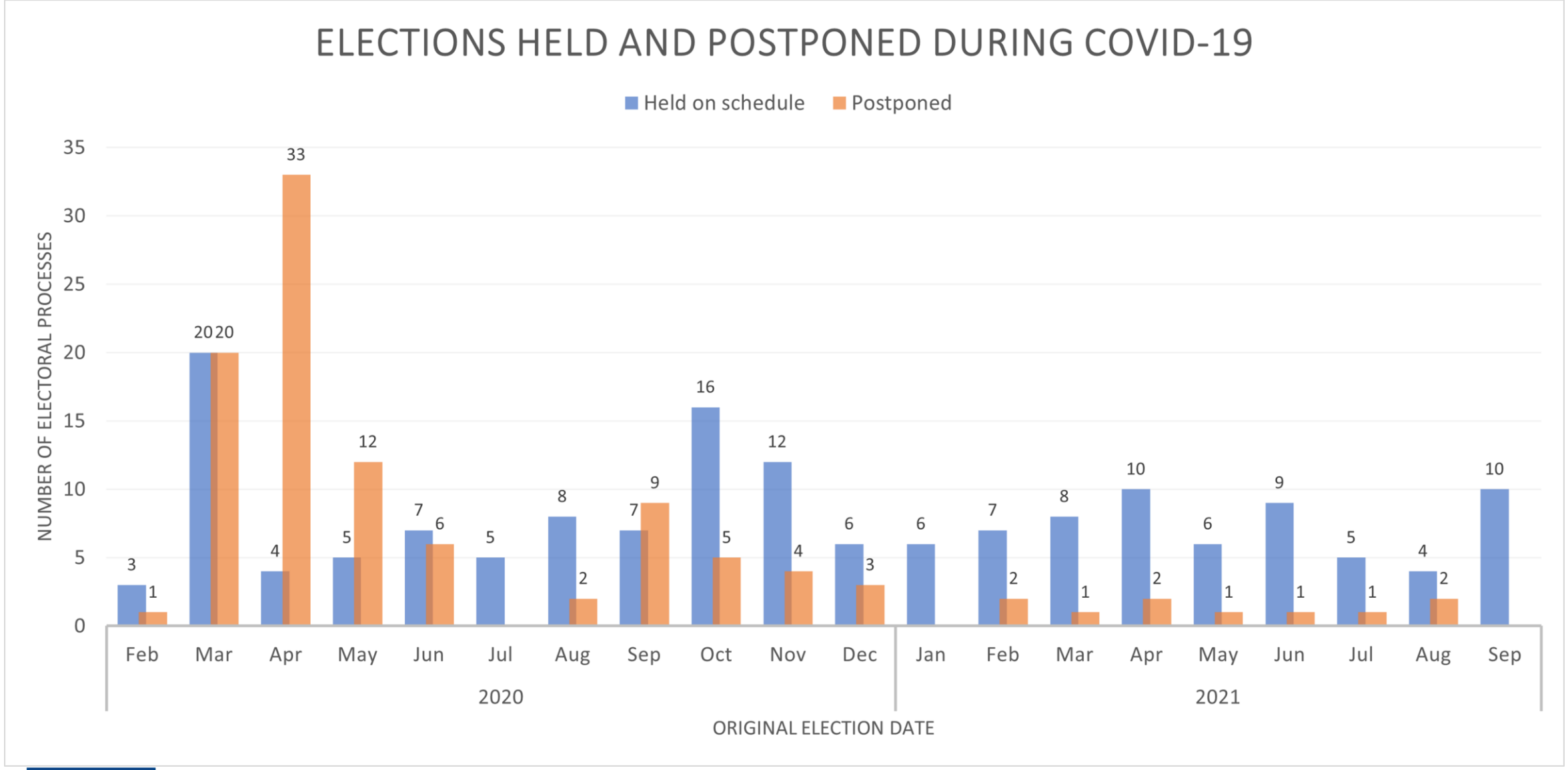
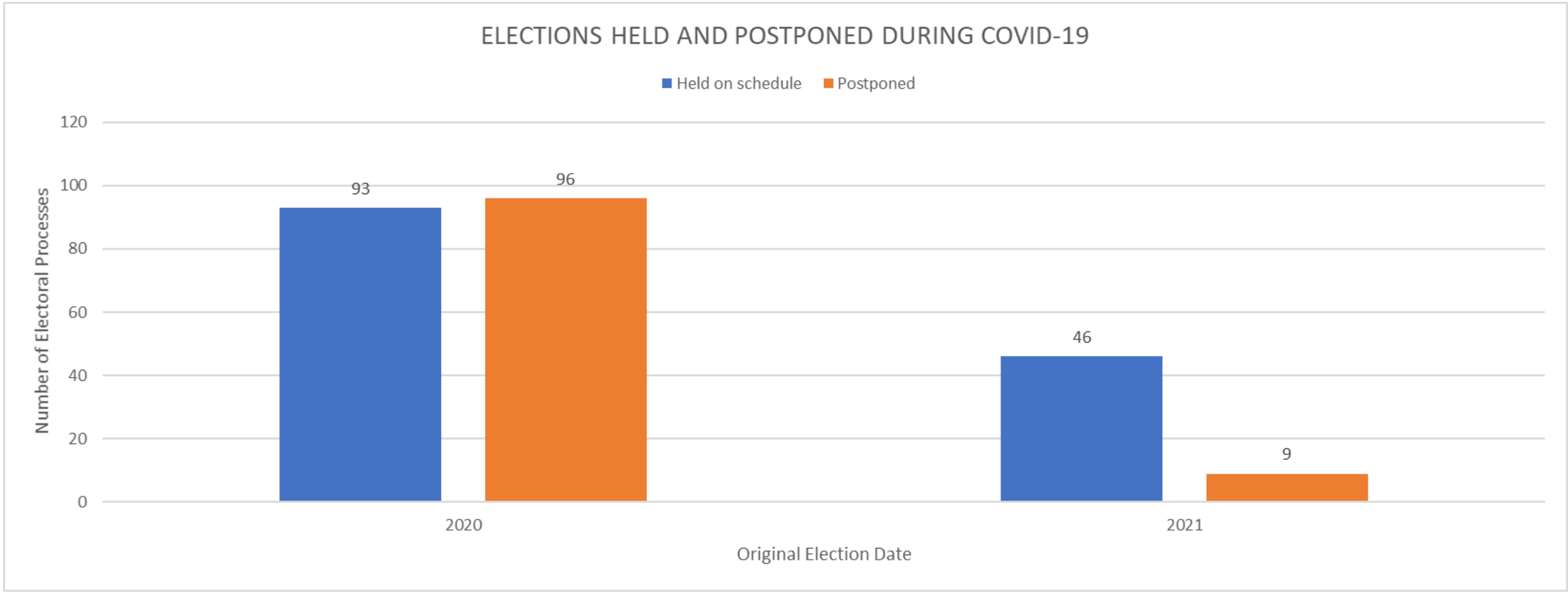
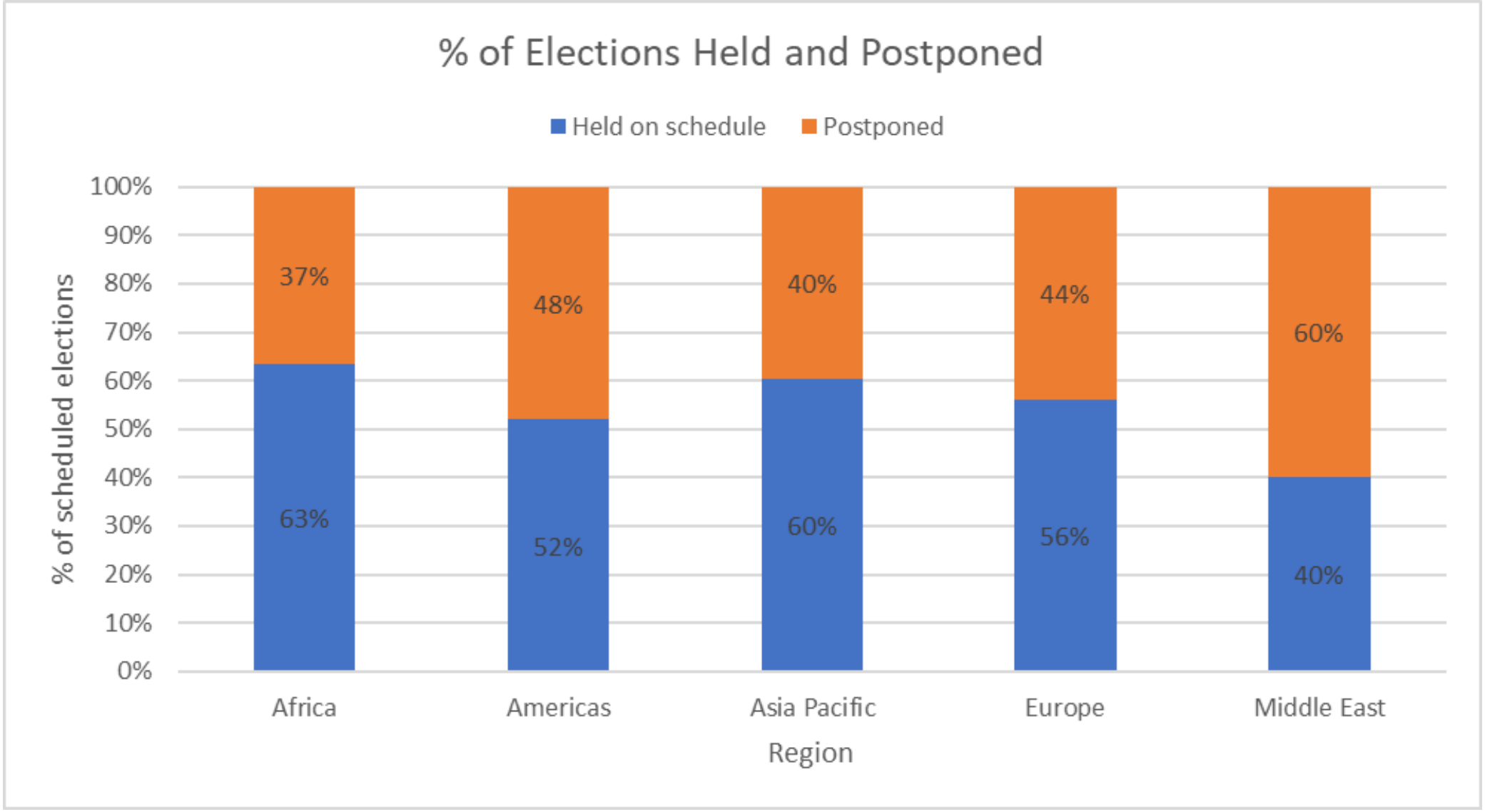
PANDEMIC
COVID-19
ELECTIONS

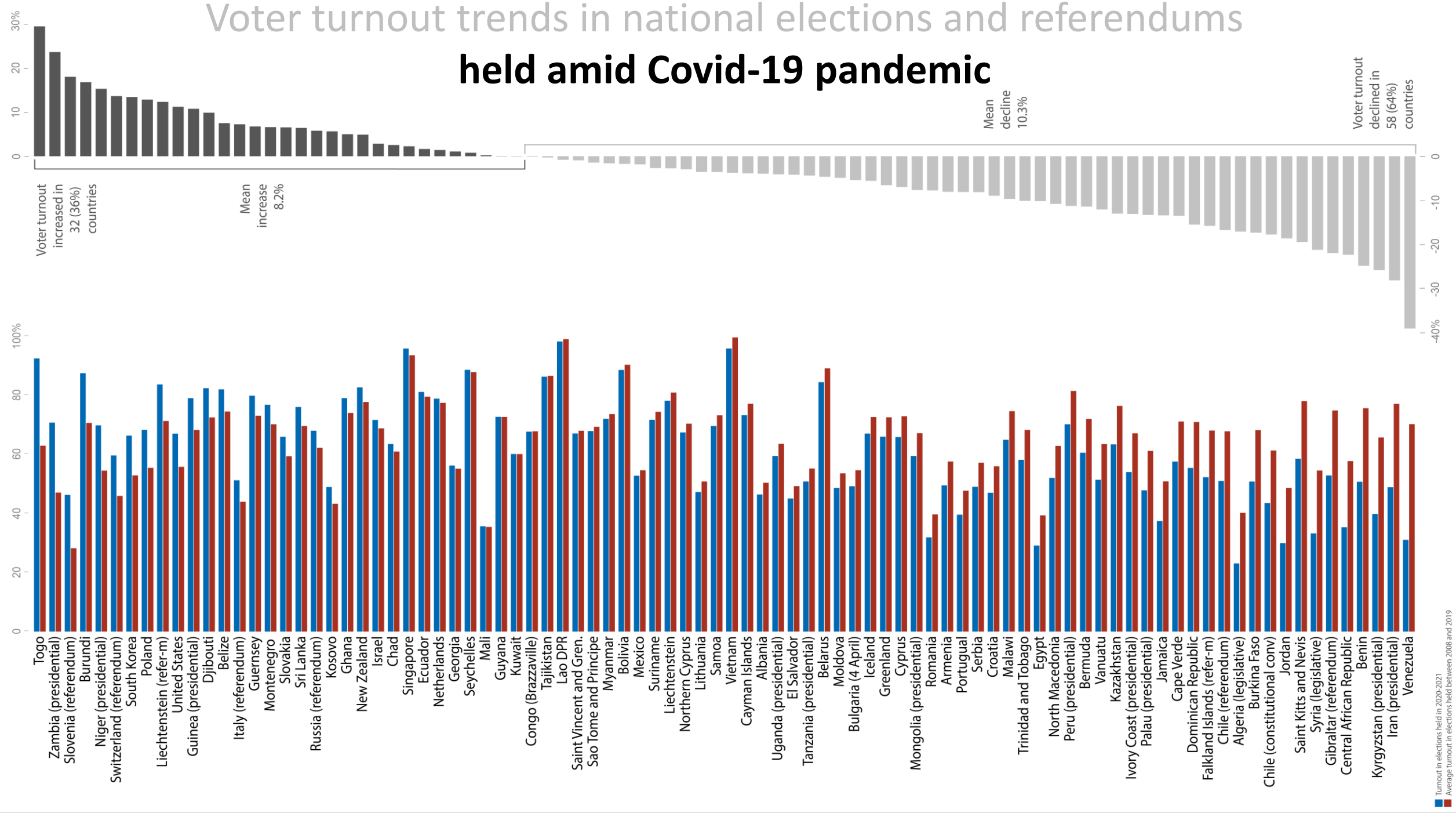

ELECTIONS HELD AND POSTPONED DURING COVID-19
Held on schedule
Postponed
NUMBER OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
3
1
2020
20
4
33
5
12
7
6
5
8
2
7
9
16
5
12
4
6
3
6
7
2
8
1
10
2
6
1
9
1
5
1
4
2
10
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
2020
2021
ORIGINAL ELECTION DATE


ELECTIONS HELD AND POSTPONED DURING COVID-19
Held on schedule
Postponed
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Number of Electoral Processes
93
96
46
9
2020
2021
Original Election Date

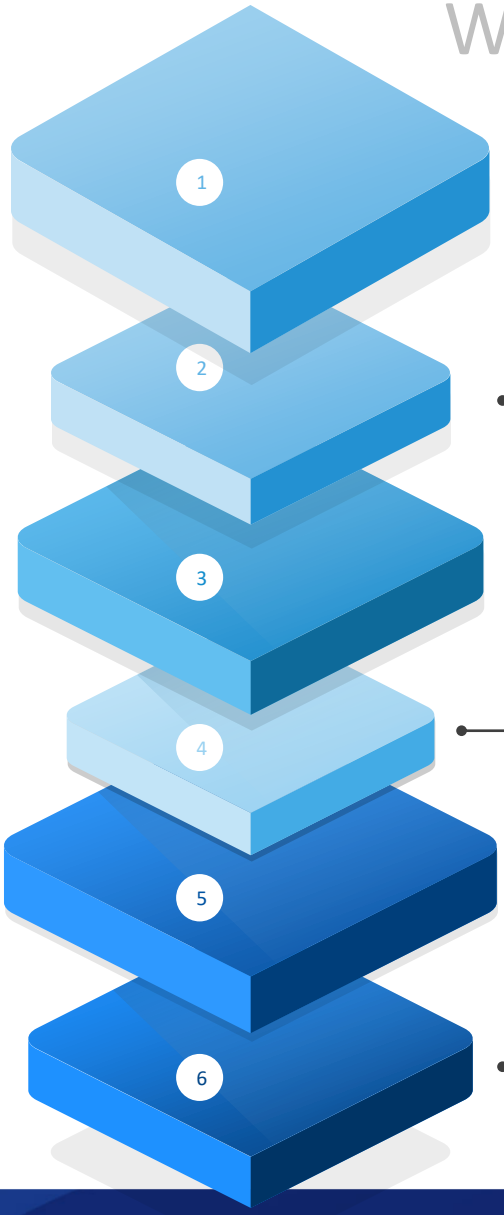

% of Elections Held and Postponed
Held on schedule
Postponed
% of scheduled elections
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
37%
63%
48%
52%
40%
60%
44%
56%
60%
40%
Africa
Americas
Asia Pacific
Europe
Middle East
Region

Voter turnout trends in national elections and referendums

held amid Covid-19 pandemic



What influenced the turnout **in elections held amid COVID-19?**



Participation challenges experienced by different (age) groups

Timing

Free movement restrictions imposed to restrain the spread of the virus

Political context

Information environment around elections

Implementation of of risk mitigation measures and use of Special Voting Arrangements (SVAs)

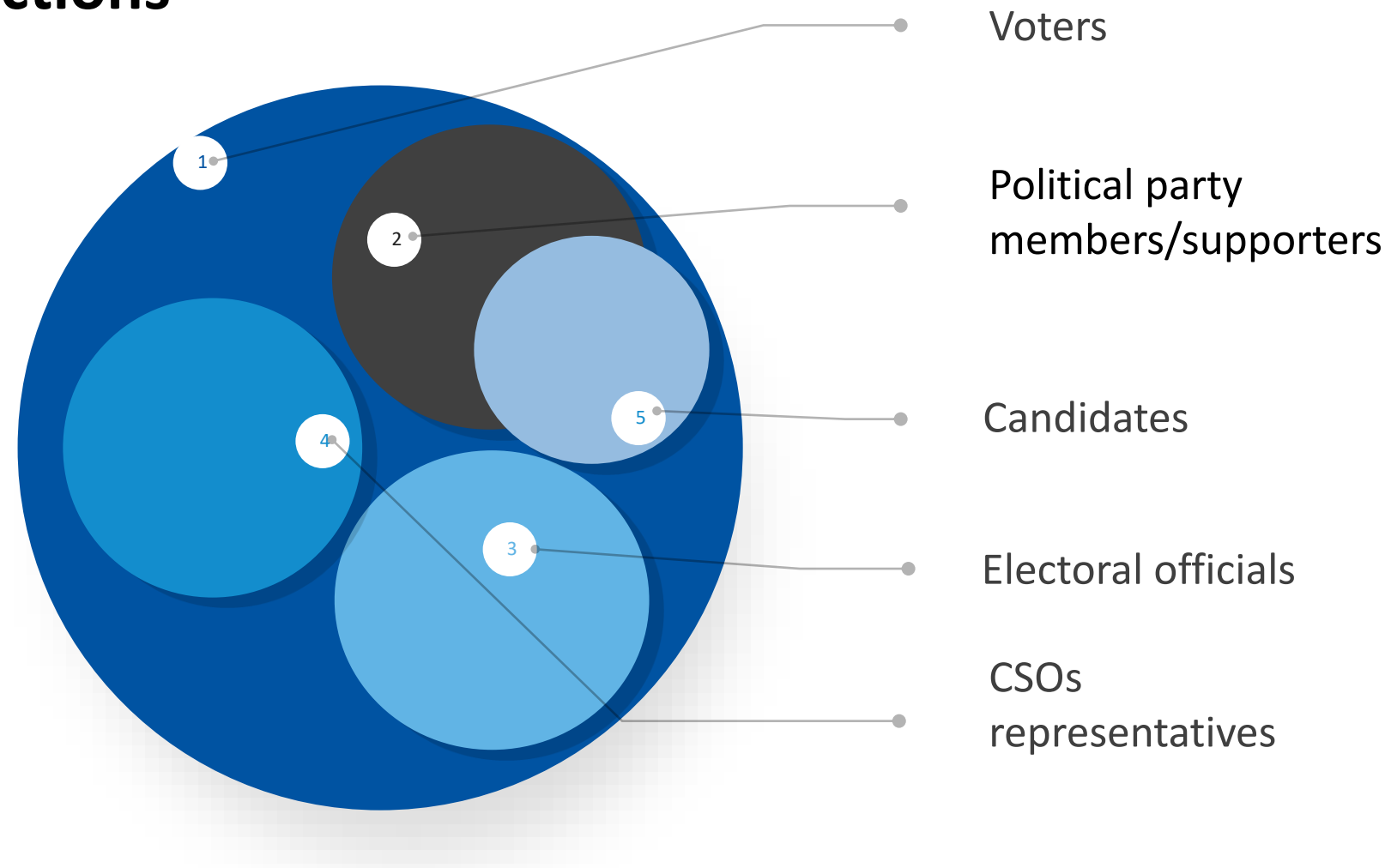
Special voting arrangements used in 2020 and 2021 national elections and referendums by country, data as of 31 August 2021

Type of SVA		Country
Early voting (25)	2020	Belarus, Bermuda*, Ghana, Iceland, Israel, Jamaica, Lithuania, Myanmar*, New Zealand, North Macedonia*, Republic of Korea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago*, USA
	2021	Cape Verde, Congo (security forces only), Israel (security forces only), Lao PDR*, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, UK (only by post)
Postal voting (16)	2020	Iceland, Lithuania, New Zealand (only from abroad), Poland*, Republic of Korea*, Romania (only from abroad), Switzerland, USA
	2021	Aruba* (voters in isolation), Ecuador, Gibraltar, Liechtenstein, Micronesia (only from abroad), Netherlands (above 70 years only), Slovenia, UK
Proxy voting (8)	2020	Belize, Croatia*, Poland, Switzerland
	2021	Algeria (various special categories of voter), Gibraltar*, Netherlands*, UK
Mobile ballot box voting (36)	2020	Belarus, Bermuda*, Croatia*, Czechia*, Georgia*, Iceland*, Italy*, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania*, Moldova*, Mongolia*, Montenegro*, Myanmar*, North Macedonia*, Republic of Korea*, Romania*, Russia, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, Suriname*, Switzerland, Tajikistan
	2021	Armenia (in-patients and voters in preliminary detention centres), Aruba (voters in hospitals, prisons and nursing homes), Bulgaria* (restricted to various special categories of voters), Bulgaria* (permanently disabled and voters in Covid quarantine), Cyprus, Ecuador, Iran*, Israel, Lao PDR, Moldova* (disabled voters), Mongolia* (restricted to various special categories of voter), Portugal*, Slovenia* (ill voters and residents of care facilities), UK

Note: Countries that include an asterisk (*) extend SVAs for Covid-19 patients.

Source: International IDEA, Featured Cases of Risk Mitigation Measures during Covid-19—Global, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>, accessed 6 September 2021.

But participation goes beyond
the act of voting in elections



COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Measures during National Elections and Referendums - Map

- Africa
- Americas
- Asia-Pacific
- Europe
- Middle East

-: Limit on number of participants at public gatherings (1)

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Measures during National Elections and Referendums - Map

- Africa
- Americas
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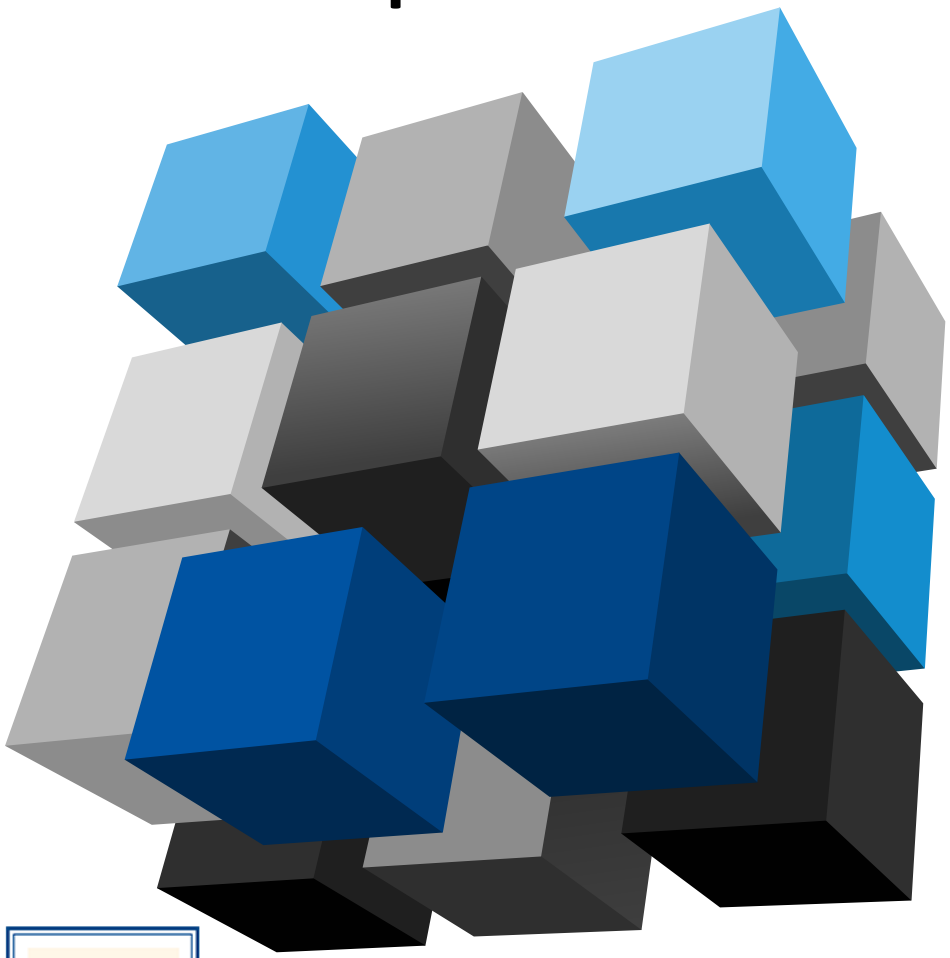
- Europe
- Middle East

-: Political rallies or events banned (1)

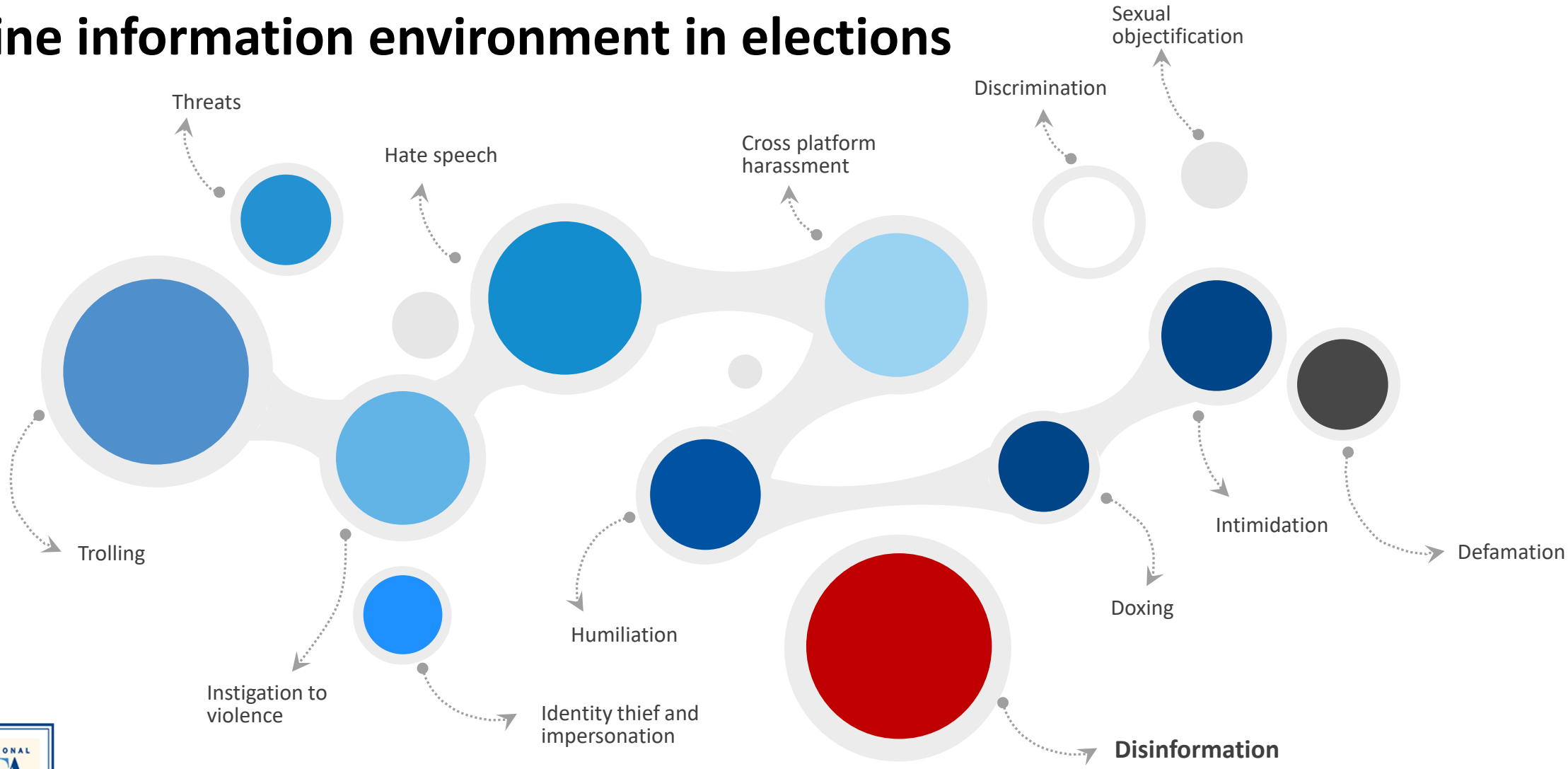
Trends in the online information space

and their impact on elections ‘20-’21



1. The focus shifted from fear of foreign interference to one where domestic disinformation rose as an equally concerning phenomenon, amplified by (artificial) social media algorithms and mainstream media. Key public figures, including state leaders and political actors act as “super-spreaders”
2. An information environment increasingly difficult to navigate due to the overwhelming amount and high variety of data and information, often conflicting. This unprecedented volume of potentially false, misleading data and information flooded the users generating a reality vertigo.
3. Manipulation campaigns across online (and traditional) media intensified.
4. Abusive limitations of the freedom of expression across the globe. The most worrisome violations are restrictions related to the freedom of expression (under the pretext of tackling disinformation), and media integrity.
5. Deficit of trust in authorities, alimented by online disinformation practices.
6. Incapacity by the online social media platforms to take measures that fit the dimension of the problem and by media.
7. **Online, gendered disinformation, discrimination and various other forms of digital aggression have surged.**
8. Internet shut downs/disruptions around elections.

The malicious use of
online information environment in elections



Who is at risk of *being left behind*?

People with disabilities 15%

IDPs, refugees and migrants

Indigenous people 5%

Youth 16%

Sexual and gender minorities

Ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities

Women 49.6%

50.4%

Male, % of total population

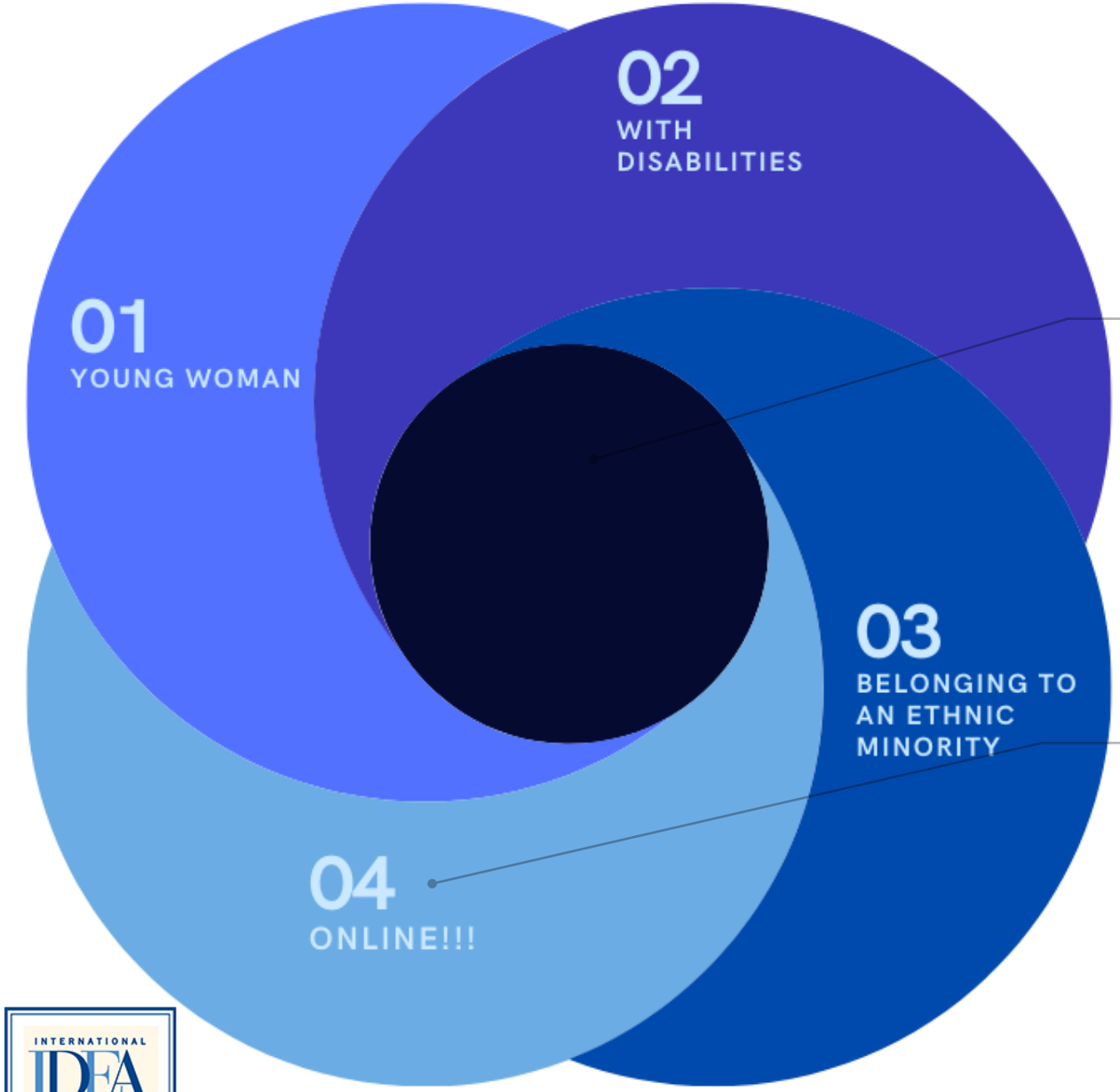
49.6%

Female, %of total population

7.8 billion

World population in 2021

www.idea.int



Intersectionality?

INTERSECTION

INTERSECTIONALITY: "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage". Oxford

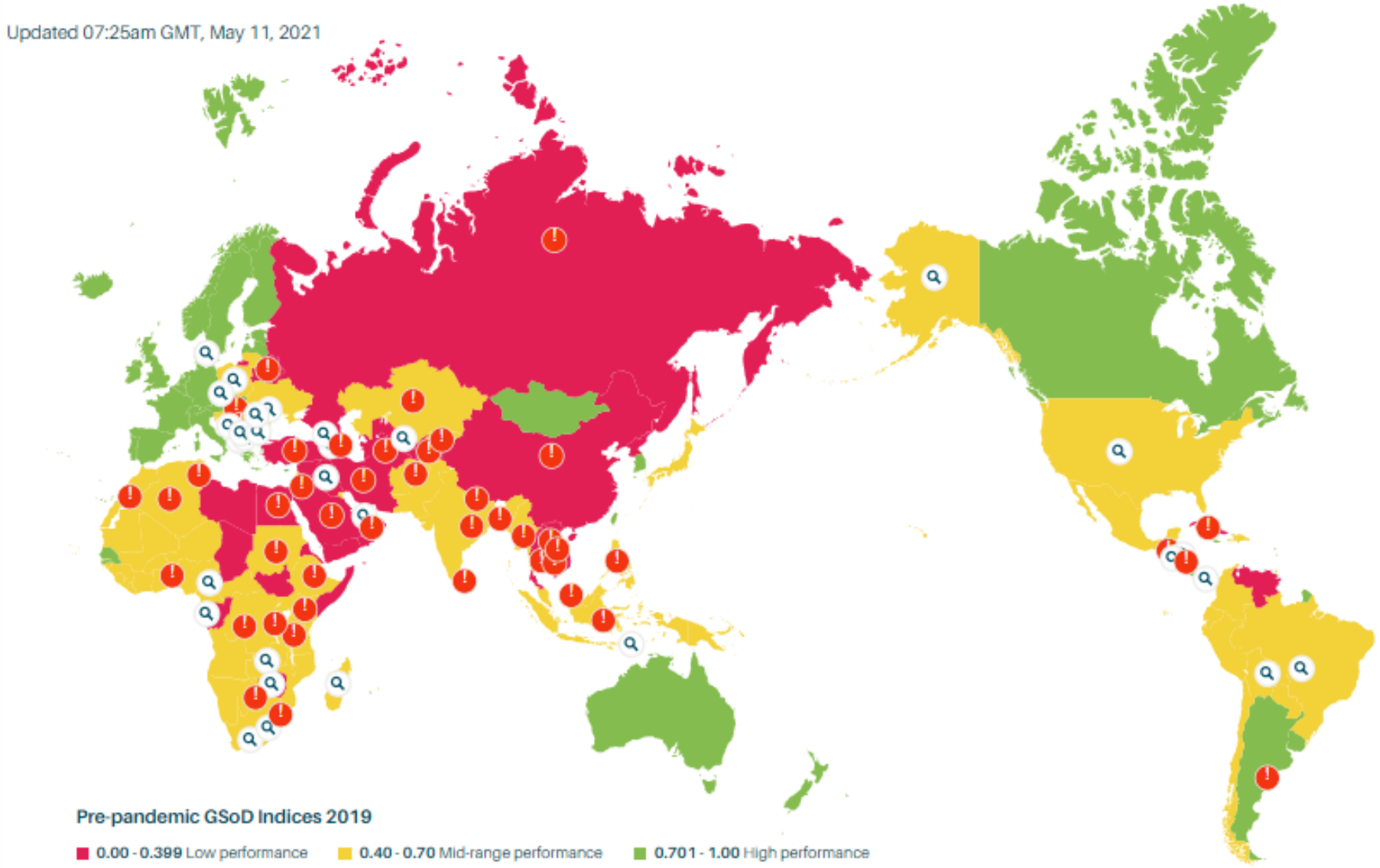
The online environment adds an extra layer of vulnerability.

So does COVID-19.

Attributes

- Representative Government
- Fundamental Rights
  - Access to Justice
  - Civil Liberties
  - ✓ Freedom of Expression
    - Freedom of Association and Assembly
    - Freedom of Religion
    - Freedom of Movement
    - Personal Integrity and Security
  - Social Rights and Equality
    - Basic Welfare

COVID-19 ☑ Global Monitor of COVID-19's impact on Democracy and Human Rights ! Concerning developments Developments to watch



Steps to overcome marginalization and **ensure inclusive electoral processes**

Thank you

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