

Freedom at the Cost of Your Health?: How Level of Democracy Impacts the Efficacy of Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic Around The World

by Jessica L. Araway, Elizabeth M. Flatoff

We look at the pandemic of COVID-19 and how it has impacted almost all states and citizens around the world as lockdowns, new policies, and masks become the norm. However, the initial response to COVID-19 has not been uniform on an international level, and case levels and death rates have fluctuated between regions and individual states. It seems that while countries with higher levels of democracy remain concerned with their citizens' freedoms while in lockdown, countries with lower levels of democracy impose strict curfews and limited freedoms without these same concerns. When looking at how the level of democracy affects the response to the pandemic, it seems to be one of the variables that greatly impacts a country's ability to respond well to the pandemic. For the purpose of this paper, a good response to the pandemic is represented by a lower case-rate and death rates, as well as a steady decline in both of these variables. A lower level of democracy will have a better initial COVID-19 response, as they did not have to consider their citizens' loss of personal freedoms within the first lockdowns. We analyzed data from V-dem, Freedom House, and the World Happiness Report, among other databases to explore whether or not level of democracy is statistically relevant to COVID-19 response through looking at the number of cases and death rates, as well as a variety of variables such as corruption, wealth, country size, federalism, and healthcare.