

A close-up photograph of a person's hands being washed with white soap. The person is wearing a white t-shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow. The image is framed by a dark blue border on the left and bottom, with a pattern of small white dots in the bottom-left corner.

• • • Human
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Human Rights during the pandemic

JUNE 2021

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Foreword



Recently I had the privilege of co-chairing the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response which was set up to review the internationally co-ordinated response to Covid-19, discern the lessons learned from that, and make recommendations for the future to ensure that the world is better prepared to address and respond to pandemic threats.

Such reviews are essential. As the old saying goes, those who don't learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

In the same spirit, the Human Rights Measurement Initiative has reviewed how the responses of a number of governments to Covid-19 have contributed to significant suffering around the world, and have undermined human dignity. As with the Independent Panel's findings, it is clear from HRMI's research that different countries' responses achieved very different results.

Wise leaders from every country can learn from one another how to minimise suffering and maximise human flourishing in even the most challenging of circumstances like a pandemic.

One of the notes of hope throughout the pandemic has been the selfless efforts of healthcare workers and all other essential workers. I commend also the vital contribution of human rights defenders everywhere, whose voices we hear in this report.

May we listen and learn.

Rt Hon Helen Clark

Former Prime Minister of New Zealand

Former United Nations Development Programme Administrator

Our sincere thanks



HRMI is a global collaborative project, where many hundreds of committed people join together to create transformative human rights tools. We are very grateful for the many people throughout the 39 countries in our annual survey who have contributed their time, knowledge, expertise, and voice to help produce the data presented in this report and on the HRMI Rights Tracker. Contributors have sacrificed time with their families, communities, and their core work to join online discussions, shape the survey, and encourage others to participate.

In particular, the data in this report would not exist without the following generous contributions.

Our HRMI Ambassadors in many countries help to spread the word and encourage local experts to share their knowledge through the HRMI survey.

We are grateful to the individual human rights practitioners tracking human rights violations on the ground, without whom we would not have this extensive data. Each respondent spent an hour or more answering survey questions on the state of human rights in their country. This year, 618 experts around the world answered the survey, providing the raw data for HRMI scores. Thank you!

HRMI's institutional bases are Motu Economic and Public Policy Research in New Zealand, and GLOBIS, the Center for Global Issues, at the University of Georgia in the United States. We are very grateful for the support of both organisations.

This report was written by a team, based on data produced by an even larger team. Among those who contributed are: Mennah Abdelwahab, Morgan Barney, Anne-Marie Brook, Eduardo Bürkle, Catherine Chong, K Chad Clay, Lisette Donewald, Christopher Felstead, Tori Hawley, Matt Kehoe Rowden, Thalia Kehoe Rowden, Emma Krass, Meridith Lavelle, Matthew Rains, Susan Randolph, Cielo Rengifo, Pratibha Singh, and Jay Stewart.

Thank you, all of you.

The HRMI team, 24 June, 2021

Introduction

The appearance of the novel coronavirus, Covid-19, has challenged governments worldwide, and caused suffering and hardship to millions. But that hardship has not been evenly distributed. The ways governments have handled the crisis have varied enormously. This has meant that by accident of geography, different people have had very different experiences over the last 18 months.

The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI), an independent, non-profit research collective, is devoted to documenting and measuring how governments treat people. Using sophisticated measurement techniques, HRMI shines a bright light on government behaviour.

As governments have faced the pressing challenge of responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, HRMI has sought to measure the impact of their responses on human rights.

In our research on how government responses to Covid-19 have affected human rights, we have observed stark differences in the actions of governments, and therefore the experiences of people.

Government responses to the pandemic affected a broad range of rights, from access to food and education, to freedom from arbitrary arrest, to voting rights. We have measured the impact on 13 human rights, and present the findings in this report.

Within each right, we found a vast range of ways the right could be infringed. For instance, governments affected the right to food in such varied ways as:

- providing culturally inappropriate food to those in quarantine;
- managing the economic challenges in such a way that food prices rose and/or incomes dropped;
- prohibiting traditional food-gathering; excluding groups of people, such as asylum seekers, from food or income support.

In this report we document some of this breadth, amplifying the voices of human rights defenders and communities in 39 countries.

Some rights restrictions may be justified in the name of public health. Some are probably unintended consequences of hasty actions; we hope these can be avoided in future. Some governments have likely used the pandemic as cover for restricting rights.

No country has been unchanged by the Covid-19 pandemic. But the wide range of government responses captured in our research shows that all countries can learn from others, and seek to do better, both in containing a novel virus, and in respecting people's rights as much as possible while doing so.

Lessons from the Pandemic



HRMI is fuelled by a belief that ‘what gets measured gets improved.’

In examining how different governments have acted over 2020, we hope to highlight solutions for the future, as all countries continue to respond to the pandemic and balance competing needs.

Several themes and conclusions have emerged from the Covid-19 research laid out in this report.

All human rights are connected

Our findings reinforce the understanding that all human rights are interconnected and interdependent in ways that are important for human flourishing. Human rights practitioners told us time and time again that the pandemic caused the violation of human rights of all kinds, not merely the right to health.

The respondents’ reports we have outlined above make many of these connections explicit. Job losses made access to food and housing more difficult. Restrictions on freedom of assembly made it more challenging for people to exercise their rights to expression and led to a drop in political participation. Enforcement of those restrictions led to an increase in arbitrary arrests and police violence.

As governments enact measures that may be justified from a public health perspective, it is vital that they consider - and mitigate - the ripple effects of their choices.

Vulnerable populations must be protected

Everywhere, those feeling the sharpest pains of government Covid-19 measures were those already vulnerable.

Undocumented people, refugees, and asylum seekers were often left out of food aid and income support. The poor were most vulnerable to the economic downturn. Women and girls, disabled people, Indigenous people, and people from ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected.

A pandemic is not a time to take our eyes away from the existing inequalities in our societies - or they will get worse.

There were no improvements

Early in the pandemic response, there were hopeful signs that there could be some positive outcomes, some silver linings, for human rights. Some countries started releasing prisoners from overcrowded facilities, and some addressed homelessness with new vigour.

Unfortunately our data show that these developments were swamped by the many more negative impacts of government responses to Covid-19. In no country did respondents report an overall improvement in the human rights landscape.

There are still plenty of silver linings to find and create, if governments choose. We hope to report better news in the future.

Empowerment rights were particularly badly affected

Government actions during the pandemic had an enormous impact on rights that promote civic discourse and empowerment: the rights to freedom of assembly and association; freedom of opinion and expression; and the right to participate in government.

Two particularly striking cases were Hong Kong and Malaysia, where the scores for all three of these rights dropped sharply from 2019 to 2020.

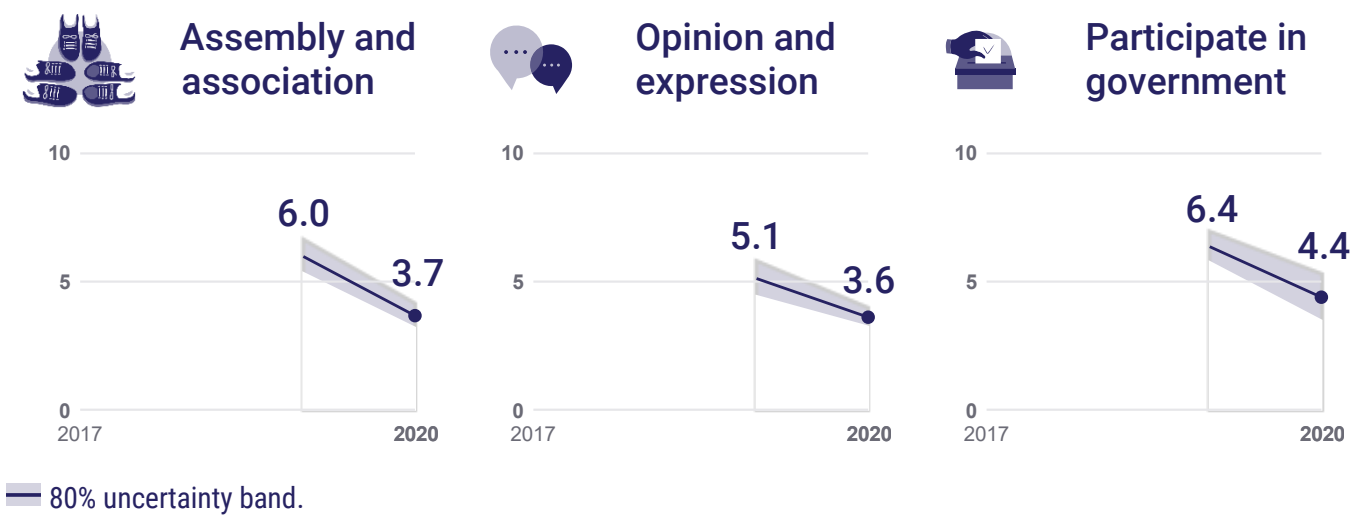
Figure 1: Hong Kong's empowerment scores fell sharply from 2019 to 2020



— 80% uncertainty band.

Source: HRMI 2021 rightstracker.org

Figure 2: Malaysia's empowerment scores fell sharply from 2019 to 2020



Source: HRMI 2021 rightstracker.org

In both Hong Kong and Malaysia, respondents reported impressions that the government was using Covid-19 measures as cover for restricting empowerment rights for other reasons.

The digital divide is a rights problem

Every child's right to education was affected by Covid-19, as governments closed schools. Unfortunately, online schooling was a solution that only reached some people. The digital divide between those with internet access and enough devices, and those without, meant that existing inequalities were further exacerbated, and some children missed out much more than others.

Care needs to be taken to boost support so that all children can enjoy this important right.

What can you do?

Leaders and governments are motivated by numbers.

The data in this report, and on HRMI's Rights Tracker, make it clear that there are many alternative paths through the pandemic. Governments can choose to protect people's human rights as they respond to Covid-19, making way for a more resilient and thriving population.

HRMI is not an advocacy organisation. We are producing these data to be used by others; people like you.

Please, show your leaders these numbers, and tell them what changes you want them to make.

Methodology



Overview

In February and March 2021, HRMI surveyed human rights practitioners in 39 countries¹ about the state of human rights in their country in 2020.

These countries were already part of HRMI's annual human rights survey that has been running for the last four years. They include countries of all sizes and levels of wealth, from all regions of the world, and include different styles of government, from democracies to autocracies, and include some non-self-governing territories. The survey includes nearly every country in the Pacific Ocean region plus several countries from every other region, with Asia being the next most well-covered region after the Pacific.²

In total, 618 people shared their knowledge of the local human rights landscape.

Survey respondents were people who had professional, first-hand knowledge of the human rights situation in a country, such as journalists, researchers at NGOs, human rights lawyers, and staff at independent National Human Rights Institutions. Academics were not generally eligible, unless their knowledge came from primary sources. Respondents had to be independent of government.³

Respondents answered the survey questions anonymously and securely using a multilingual online service.

Full information about the survey methodology can be found in our full methodology handbook, available from humanrightsmmeasurement.org.

In the survey, respondents were asked four kinds of questions about a range of different human rights.

Respondents in Pacific countries were also asked an extra set of questions specific to regional concerns

¹ American Samoa, Angola, Australia, Brazil, Cook Islands, DR Congo, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mozambique, Nauru, Nepal, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam.

²For the initial pilot of the expert survey, we sought nominations of countries to include. 13 diverse countries from all over the world were nominated, and we continue to include these countries in our survey sample each year. More recently we have been focussing on region by region expansion, depending on funding secured. Our goal is to include every country in the world as soon as funding permits.

³ Respondents had to be independent of government, except in countries with a population under 120,000 people, where government employees with minimal conflicts of interest could participate. Extra care was taken in the analysis to ensure that pro-government bias did not affect the results.

Civil and political rights in 2020, compared to 2019

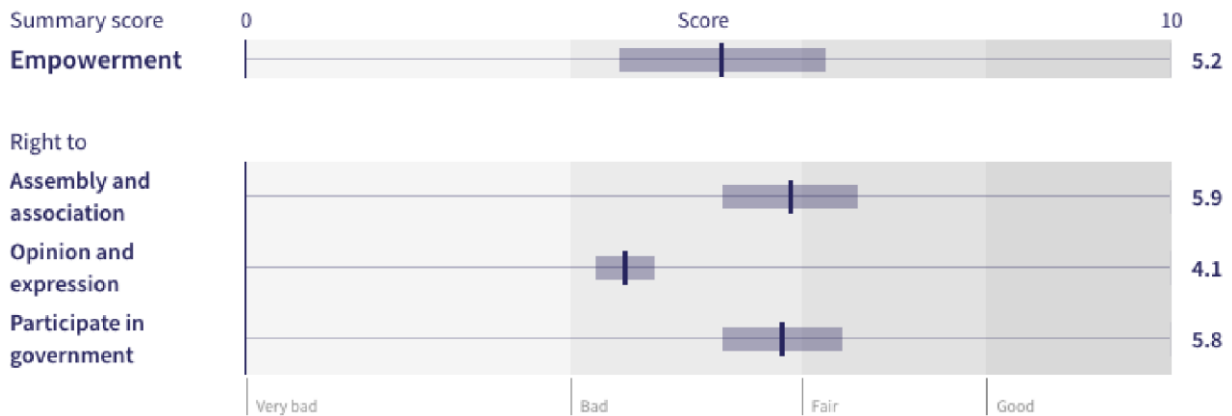
The survey asked for respondents' impressions of how common a selection of civil and political rights violations were in their country in 2020. They were then also asked to compare 2020 to 2019.

Respondents' answers were analysed using Bayesian measurement models to build directly comparable scores for each country.

Scores are then displayed on a 0-10 scale at RightsTracker.org, as in this screenshot of Brazil's empowerment scores, which show that many people are not enjoying their civil liberties and political freedoms.

Scores are presented within uncertainty bands, showing the range of scores that we calculate are likely to be correct. There is more uncertainty about a score if a) a small number of respondents answer the question and/or b) people's answers are different from one another.

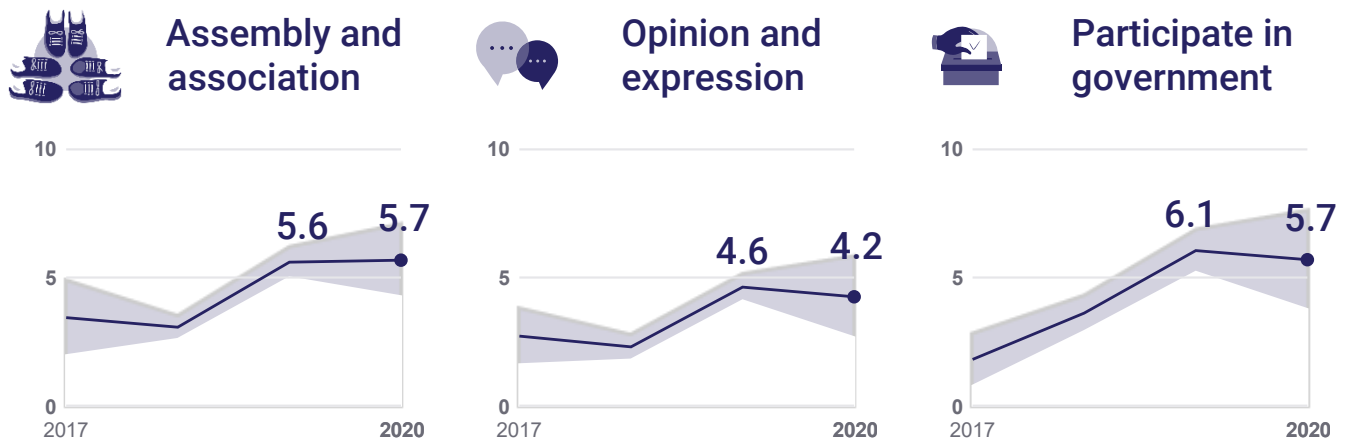
Figure 3: Empowerment scores for Brazil, shown within their uncertainty bands



Source: HRMI 2021 rightstracker.org

On the Rights Tracker you can also see trends over time, as in this figure showing how empowerment rights scores have improved in the Democratic Republic of Congo recently.

Figure 4: Empowerment scores for Democratic Republic of Congo, over the years 2017-2020



— 80% uncertainty band.

Source: HRMI 2021 rightstracker.org

Isolating the effect of Covid-19 on human rights

For three broad categories of human rights (Quality of life/economic and social rights; Safety from the state/physical integrity rights; Empowerment rights) respondents were then asked the same question about Covid-19.

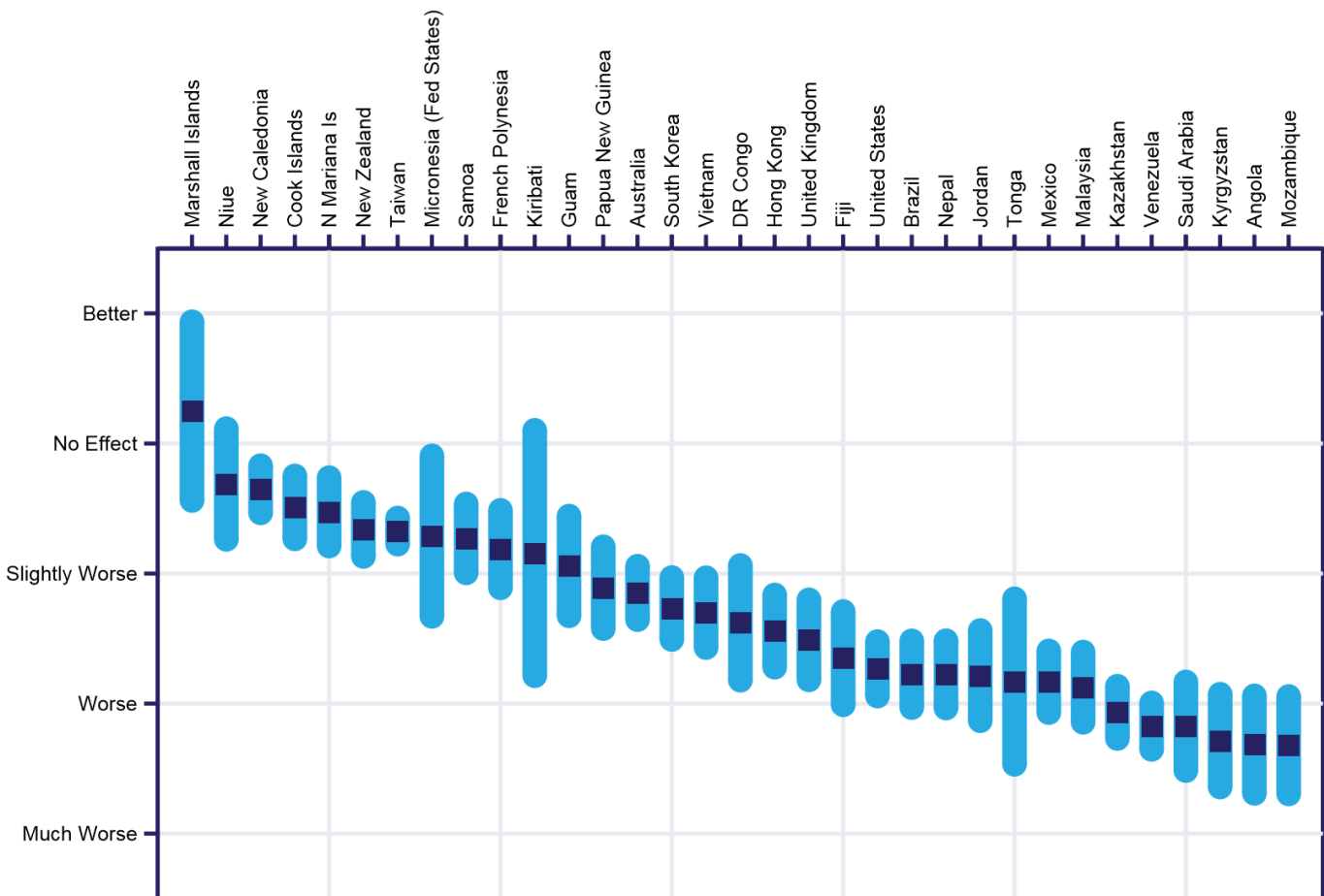
For example, here is the question from the English language version, asking about Safety from the state rights:

During 2020 in [Country], what effect did the Covid-19 pandemic have on physical integrity rights violations, including disappearance, extrajudicial killing, death penalty execution, torture or ill-treatment, and political or arbitrary arrest and detention, committed by government agents (such as soldiers, police officers, or others working for or with the government)?

- MUCH WORSE:** Due to Covid-19, many more people had these rights violated by government agents
- WORSE:** Due to Covid-19, some more people had these rights violated by government agents
- SLIGHTLY WORSE:** Due to Covid-19, a few more people had these rights violated by government agents
- NO EFFECT:** Covid-19 had no effect on physical integrity rights violations by government agents
- BETTER:** Due to Covid-19, fewer people had these rights violated by government agents

Respondents' answers were analysed and the results presented within uncertainty bands.

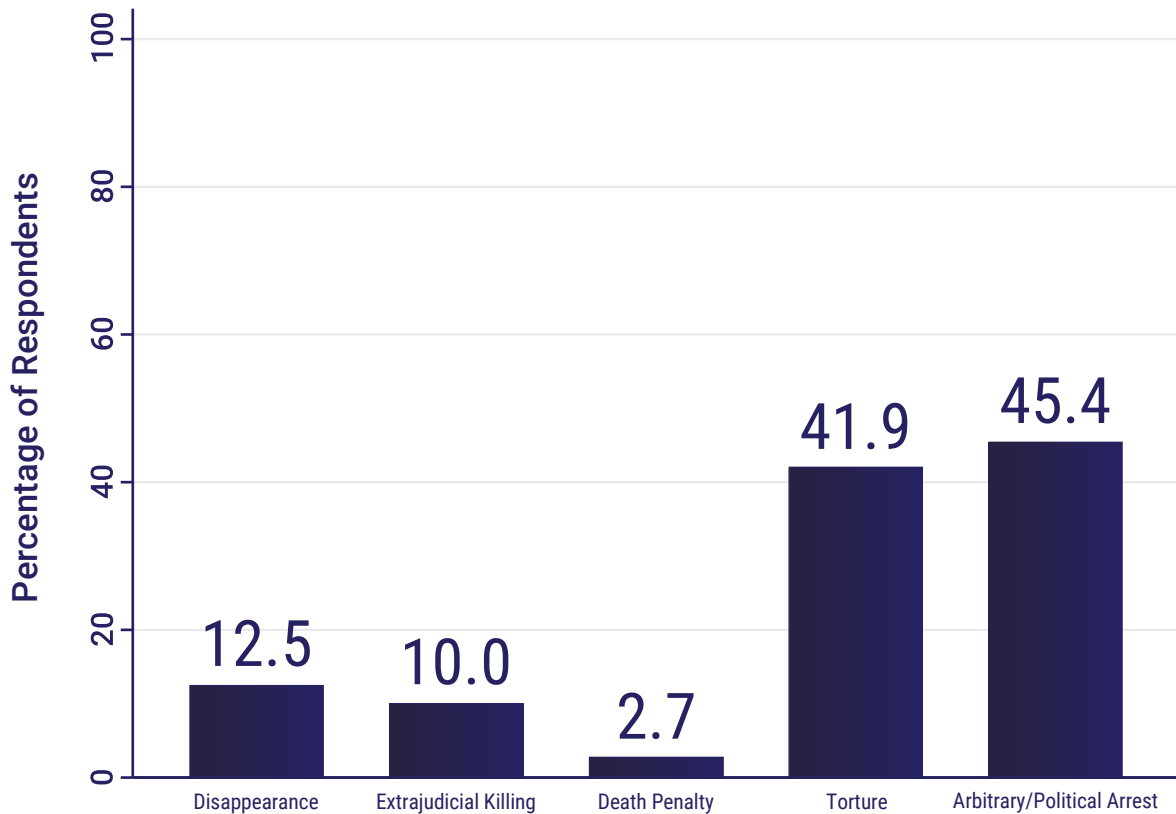
Figure 5: The impact of the pandemic on Safety from the State rights ranged widely among the 39 countries, from 'no effect' to 'much worse'



Isolating the affected rights

Respondents were then asked which of the rights in that category were particularly affected by the pandemic. We display the results in bar charts, in each category section below. For example, this bar chart shows that most of the negative impact of the pandemic on physical integrity rights was on the right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment, and the right to freedom from arbitrary or political arrest.

Figure 6: Across all countries, respondents said that these Safety from the State rights were adversely affected by Covid-19



People at risk

For the eight civil and political rights, as well as five economic and social rights, respondents were also asked which groups of people were at particular risk of rights violations.

Respondents could select any of 39 groups of people. The results are displayed on each country page of the Rights Tracker as a word cloud, as in this screenshot, for Kyrgyzstan, on the right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment:

Figure 7: In Kyrgyzstan, many groups of people were at particular risk of violations of the right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment Interpretation: Larger text = more human rights experts identified this group as being at risk.

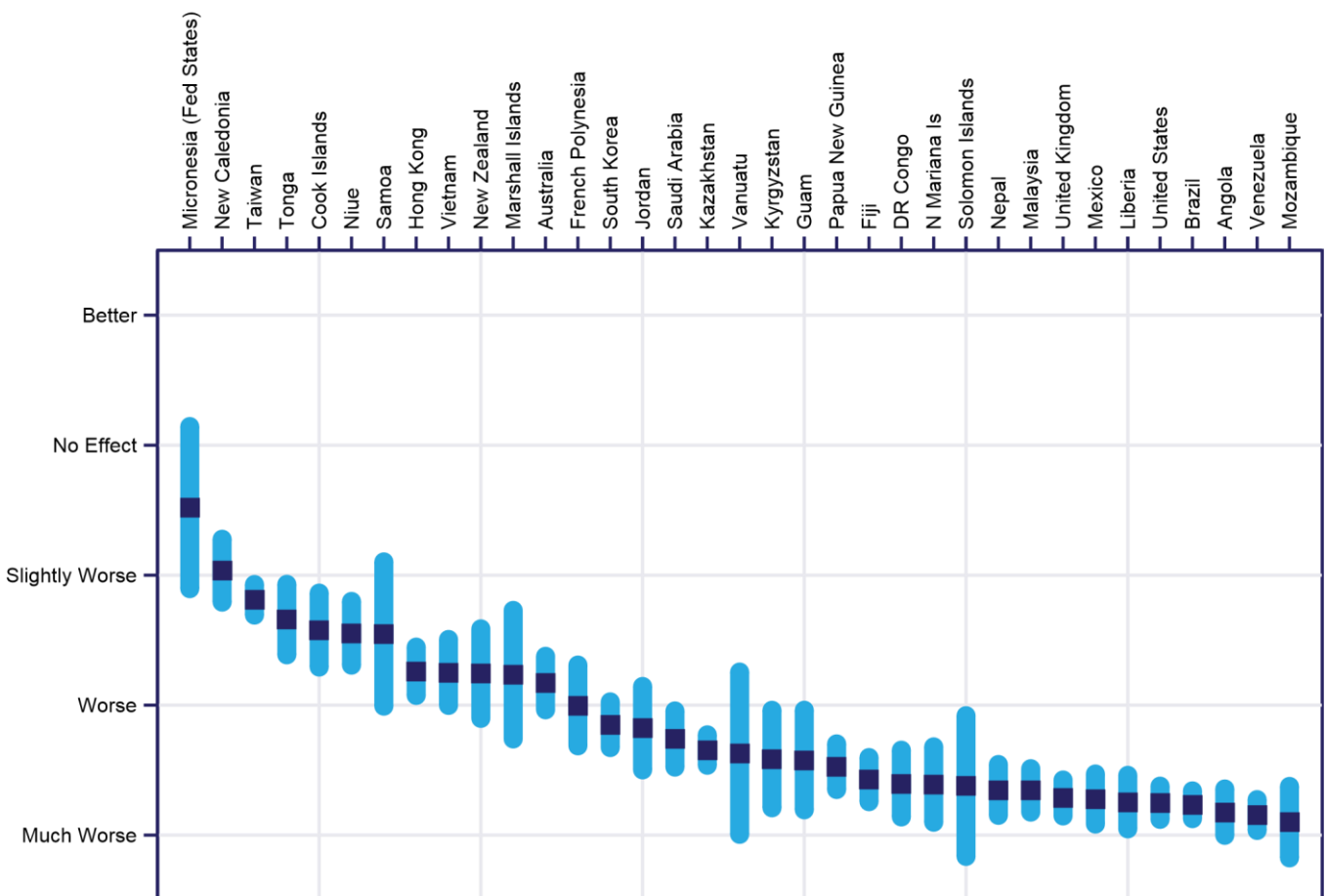


There was also space in the survey for people to give further information in their own words, which we have summarised on the Rights Tracker. Much of this extra information centred on the effect of Covid-19 on human rights, and is organised thematically and presented below.

Quality of life: economic and social rights

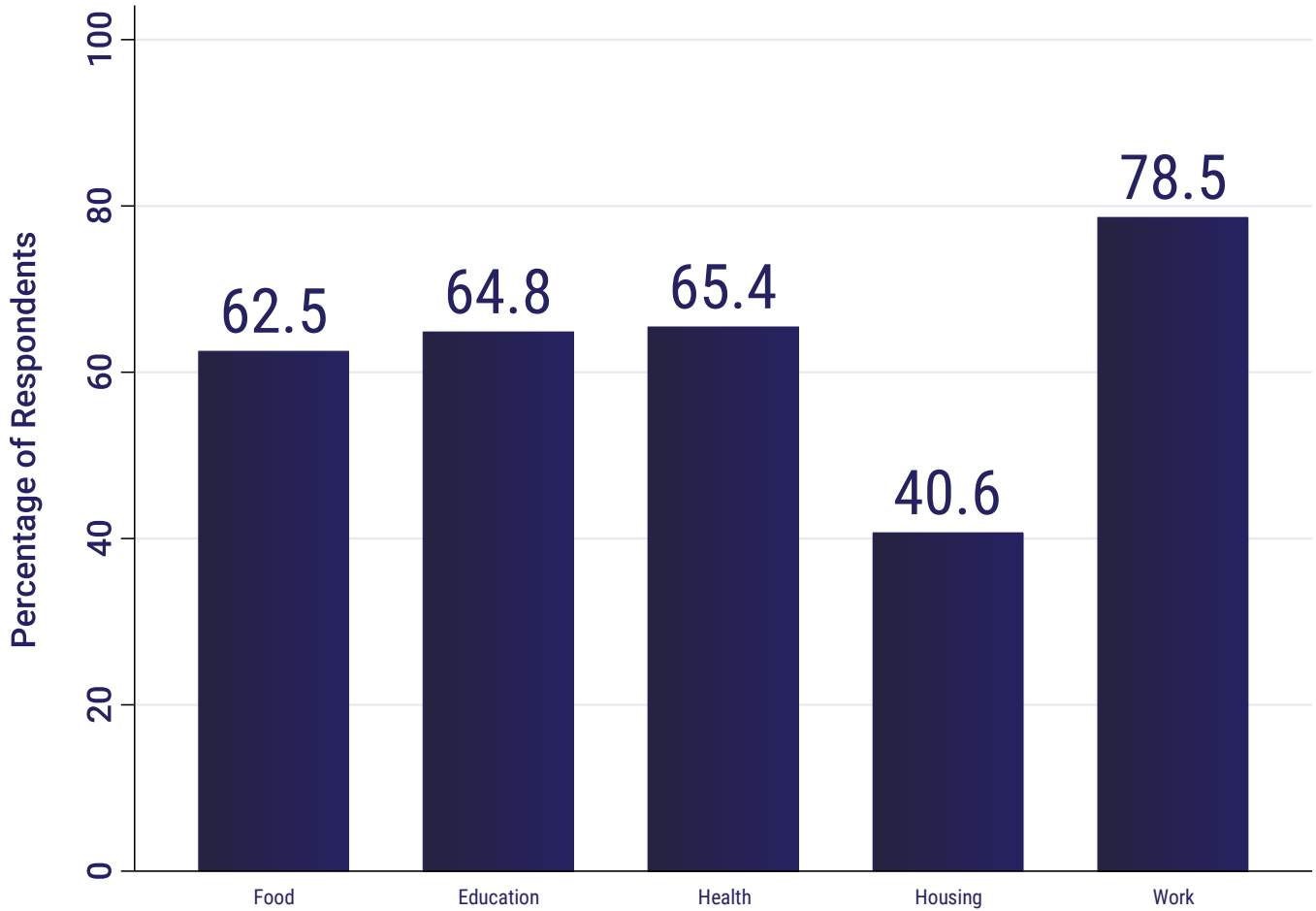
When asked about economic and social rights, respondents in every country said that Covid-19 had made the human rights landscape worse. Of the three categories of rights we asked about, the effect was generally stronger in this category – that is, the pandemic had a worse impact on economic and social rights than other rights, on average.

Figure 8: Economic and social rights were badly affected in every country



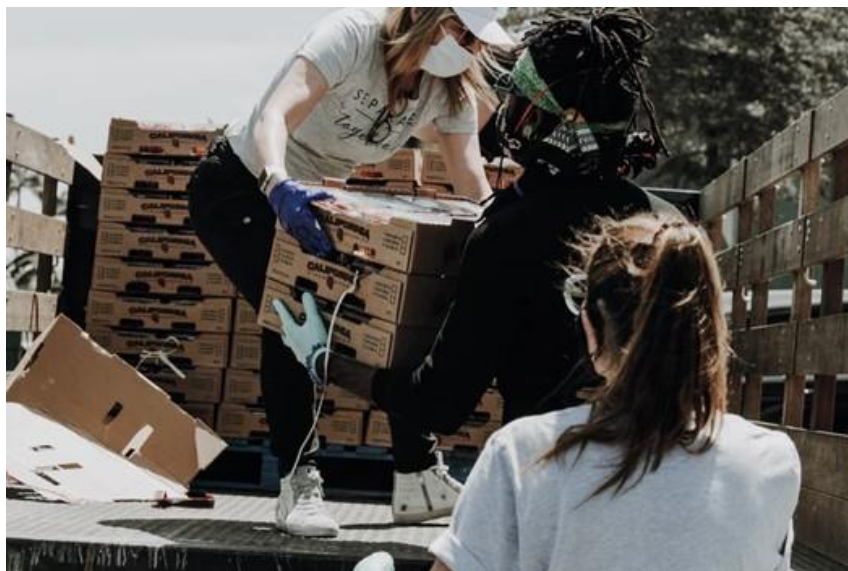
When asked which economic and social rights were most affected, human rights experts said all five of the rights we measure were badly affected.

Figure 9: All economic and social rights were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the right to work



Right to food

Everyone has the fundamental right to be free from hunger.



Everyone has the right to enjoy 'the availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy [their] dietary needs ... free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture' (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Article 11 and Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, General Comment 12).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 62.5% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to food.

Government responses to Covid-19 affected people's enjoyment of the right to food in many different ways. In the list below, we summarise them, and indicate in brackets where respondents observed them happening. This does not mean these things did not happen in other countries, just that respondents made a point of noting them in comments on the named countries.

- Lockdowns and travel restrictions made food practically harder to access (eg, Australia, Nepal, New Zealand)
- Job losses meant people had less money to spend on food (eg, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa)
- Food became more expensive (eg, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Samoa, Venezuela)
- Food transports and supplies were disrupted (eg, Cook Islands)
- The pandemic restricted access to traditional, nutritious diets (eg, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia; Guam; New Caledonia)
- Lockdowns and travel restrictions meant some people could not access affordable food as usual (Kazakhstan)
- Agricultural activity decreased (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo)

- During strict lockdowns, the government provided food that was culturally inappropriate for some (eg, Australia, Hong Kong)
- The government provided inadequate food to those in detention (eg, Malaysia, Mexico)
- The government failed to effectively distribute food aid to all in need (eg, Kyrgyzstan)
- Government corruption prevented effective responses to food insecurity (eg, Liberia)
- Government corruption led to uneven food distribution, favouring political allies over others (eg, Mozambique)
- Women and girls had restricted access to food markets (eg, Liberia)
- Disabled people, older people, and those without internet access found food shopping difficult or impossible (eg, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Venezuela)
- Border closures affected both food supplies and income security (eg, New Caledonia)
- School closures affected children who relied on being fed at school (eg, Northern Mariana Islands, United Kingdom, United States)
- Government food assistance was not extended to some undocumented people or asylum seekers (eg, Australia, New Zealand, Northern Mariana Islands, United Kingdom)
- Government austerity measures affected food security (eg, United Kingdom) Structural racism increased the negative impact of the pandemic on food security for non-white people (United States)

Right to education

Everyone has the right to a quality, relevant, and culturally appropriate education.



We are all entitled to a primary, secondary, higher, technical/vocational, and fundamental education that is physically accessible and financially affordable (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 13, and Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights General Comments 11 and 13).

On average, across the 39 countries surveyed, 64.8% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to education.

Responses to Covid-19, such as school closures and shifts to online learning, limited the accessibility of education for many students around the world. The list below summarises how Covid-19 measures impacted the right to education and indicates in brackets the countries noted by our respondents. This does not mean these things did not happen in other countries, just that respondents made a point of noting them in their comments on the named countries.

- Schools closed in most countries we measured (eg, Angola, Australia, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan, Liberia, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mozambique, New Caledonia, Nepal, New Zealand, Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, South Korea, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela)
- Schooling was conducted in many countries using online technology. This excluded those without access to the internet or appropriate devices (eg, Angola, Australia, Brazil, Fiji, Guam, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, South Korea, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela)

- Unstable electricity and/or internet services impacted remote learning (eg, Fiji, Mexico, Mozambique, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela)
- Disabled children and students with extra learning needs were not sufficiently accommodated by the remote learning systems (eg, New Zealand, United Kingdom)
- Children who were not native speakers of the school language suffered from the lack of face-to-face teaching and social contact (eg, United Kingdom)

Right to health

Everyone has the right to the 'highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.'



We are all entitled to timely and appropriate healthcare facilities and services that promote physical and mental health. This includes maternal, child and reproductive health care; preventative and curative health care; disease control, health rehabilitation; and natural and workplace environmental health (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 12.1; Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights General Comment 14).

Across the 39 countries surveyed, 65.4% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to health.

Obviously, Covid-19 affected the health of millions of people worldwide. On top of that burden, government responses to the pandemic impacted the right to health in numerous different ways, summarised in the list below. In brackets we have noted the countries where respondents observed these occurrences. This does not mean these things did not happen in other countries, just that respondents made a point of noting them in their comments on the named countries.

- Government mismanagement of the pandemic led to infections and deaths (eg, Brazil, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia, Mexico, United Kingdom)
- Government denial of the seriousness of the pandemic led members of the public to take insufficient public health precautions (eg, Brazil)
- Government corruption led to shortages of medicines (eg, Kazakhstan)
- High numbers of infections led to hospital overcrowding (eg, Brazil, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan)
- The healthcare system was already in crisis, and this was exacerbated by Covid-19 (eg, Venezuela),

- Healthcare workers were exposed to infection, impacting them, and also the patients they could no longer care for (eg, Kyrgyzstan, Venezuela) Healthcare workers were not paid (eg, Liberia)
- Healthcare workers left the country (eg, Venezuela)
- Many people had to continue to work in 'essential' jobs, while others were more protected by staying home (eg, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam)
- People were forced to return to traditional villages where they had little access to healthcare (eg, Solomon Islands)
- Hospitals and healthcare workers were not sufficiently trained and/or lacked equipment to cope with the pandemic (eg, Brazil, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mexico)
- Health systems prioritised the response to Covid-19, and could not address other health needs adequately (eg, Cook Islands, Fiji, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, South Korea, United Kingdom, Venezuela)
- Restrictions on movement reduced access to healthcare for conditions other than Covid-19 (eg, Australia)
- Infection prevention protocols reduced access to healthcare for elderly people in care homes (eg, Australia)
- The elderly were more likely to contract Covid-19, to be seriously ill, and to die from it (eg, Kyrgyzstan, United Kingdom).
- Humanitarian aid was stolen (eg, Kyrgyzstan)
- Privacy in healthcare decreased (eg, Taiwan)
- Masks were difficult to purchase for those without legal status (eg, Taiwan)
- Covid-19 public health information was not published in enough languages to reach migrants (eg, Taiwan)
- Young disabled people were low on the vaccine priority list (eg, United Kingdom)
- Elderly people in care homes were not allowed to access hospital care (eg, Australia)
- General healthcare and medicine costs increased (eg, Kazakhstan)
- Food prices increased, which impacted health (eg, Solomon Islands)
- Job losses decreased access to healthcare (eg, Fiji)
- Detainees' and prisoners' lack of healthcare was exacerbated by Covid-19 (eg, United States) Structural inequality meant the 'essential workers' who were more exposed to Covid-19 were disproportionately of racial minorities. (eg, United States)
- Some people did not have sufficient space in their homes to quarantine from family members with Covid-19 (eg, Northern Mariana Islands).

Right to housing

Everyone has the fundamental right to habitable and culturally appropriate housing.



We are all entitled to housing that is accessible to services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure. This includes '...safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage, and emergency services' (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 11.1, and Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights General Comment 4.12).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 40.6% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to housing.

Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic affected people's enjoyment of the right to housing in substantial ways, often overlapping with the right to an adequate income. The list below summarises respondents' reports and indicates in brackets the countries where respondents observed these things happening. This does not mean they only happened in the mentioned countries, just that respondents made a point of noting them in their comments on the named countries.

- Job losses due to Covid-19 affected people's access to adequate housing (eg, Angola, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, French Polynesia, Hong Kong, Nepal, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela)
- Homelessness increased (eg, Brazil)
- Existing lack of water and sanitation made people more vulnerable to Covid-19 (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Illegal evictions occurred as a result of Covid-19, with migrants and refugees being most at risk (eg, Malaysia)

- People who are homeless were housed by the government during the initial lockdown, but that support did not continue afterwards (eg, New Zealand)
- Women and/or girls, who are fighting for land to build their homes, found that this problem got less attention because of Covid-19 (eg, Tuvalu)
- Structural racism put racial and ethnic minorities at extra risk due to lower incomes and increased risk of eviction (eg, United States)

Right to work

Everyone is entitled to a good job and to earn – or have provided from another source – a decent living.



Everyone is entitled to the opportunity to gain a living by work that is freely chosen and 'the right to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work'. This includes 'equal pay for equal work, the chance to earn a decent living for [ourselves] and [our] families, just and safe working conditions, and a reasonable limitation of working hours' (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Articles 6 and 7).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 78.6% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to work.

The economic impacts of Covid-19 have been widely felt. The right to work and to have adequate income have been significantly affected by Covid-19 measures, such as restrictions that unintentionally increased unemployment. There are also reports of discrimination in work and income against many different groups of people. The qualitative data from the 2021 survey reveal some of the many ways the right to work has been threatened by Covid-19 and the groups of people our respondents identified as being particularly affected.

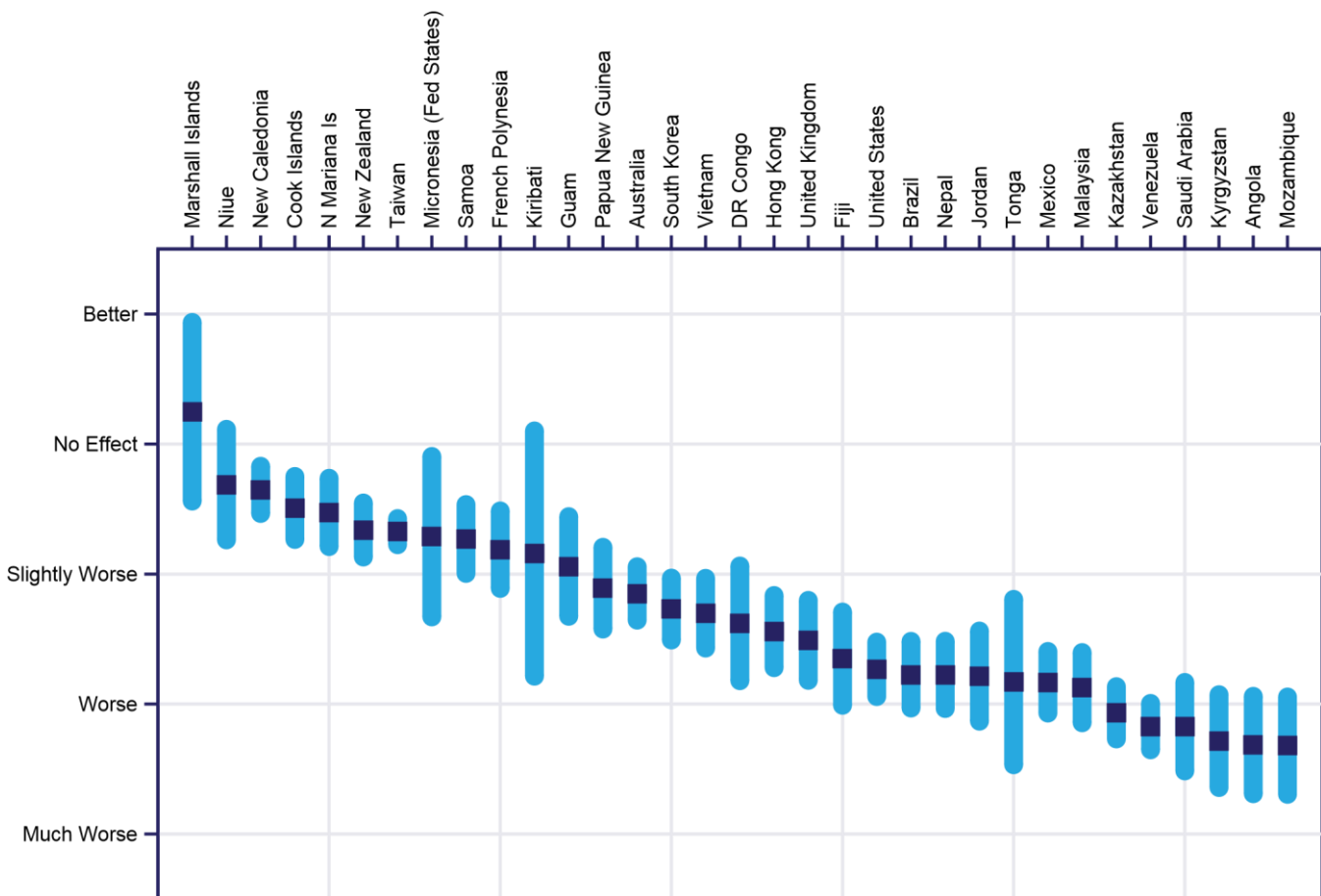
- Covid-19 related economic downturns led to increased unemployment (eg, Angola, Brazil, Cook Islands, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mexico, Nepal, Niue, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela)
- Restriction of movement threatened jobs (eg, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Marshall Islands) Non-citizens, and/or refugees, and/or people without legal status could not access government assistance when they lost their jobs (eg, Australia)
- Non-citizens, and/or refugees, and/or people without legal status were badly affected by job losses (eg, Northern Mariana Islands)

- Government response to job loss and income loss was inadequate (eg, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Samoa)
- People whose jobs couldn't be done from home lost work during lockdowns (eg, New Zealand)
- Structural inequality meant the 'essential workers' who were more exposed to Covid-19 were disproportionately of racial minorities (eg, United States)
- Many people had to continue to work in 'essential' jobs, and be more at risk of Covid-19, while others were more protected by staying home (eg, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, United States, Venezuela)
- Migrant workers were blamed and targeted for bringing Covid-19 to the country (eg, Hong Kong)
- Covid-19 policies excluded foreigners from employment (eg, Malaysia)
- LGBTQIA+ people were particularly affected by unemployment during the pandemic (eg, Mozambique)
- Women were particularly affected by unemployment during the pandemic (eg, Mozambique, Nepal, Vanuatu)
- People with disabilities were particularly affected by unemployment during the pandemic (eg, Mozambique)
- Young people were particularly affected by unemployment during the pandemic (eg, United Kingdom)
- Young people and recent graduates found it difficult to enter the workforce (eg, Solomon Islands)
- People with less education were most likely to lose their jobs (eg, Tonga)
- Border closures affected migrant workers' ability to access work (eg, South Korea)
- Lack of union and worker protections exacerbated problems (eg, United States)

Safety from the State: physical integrity rights

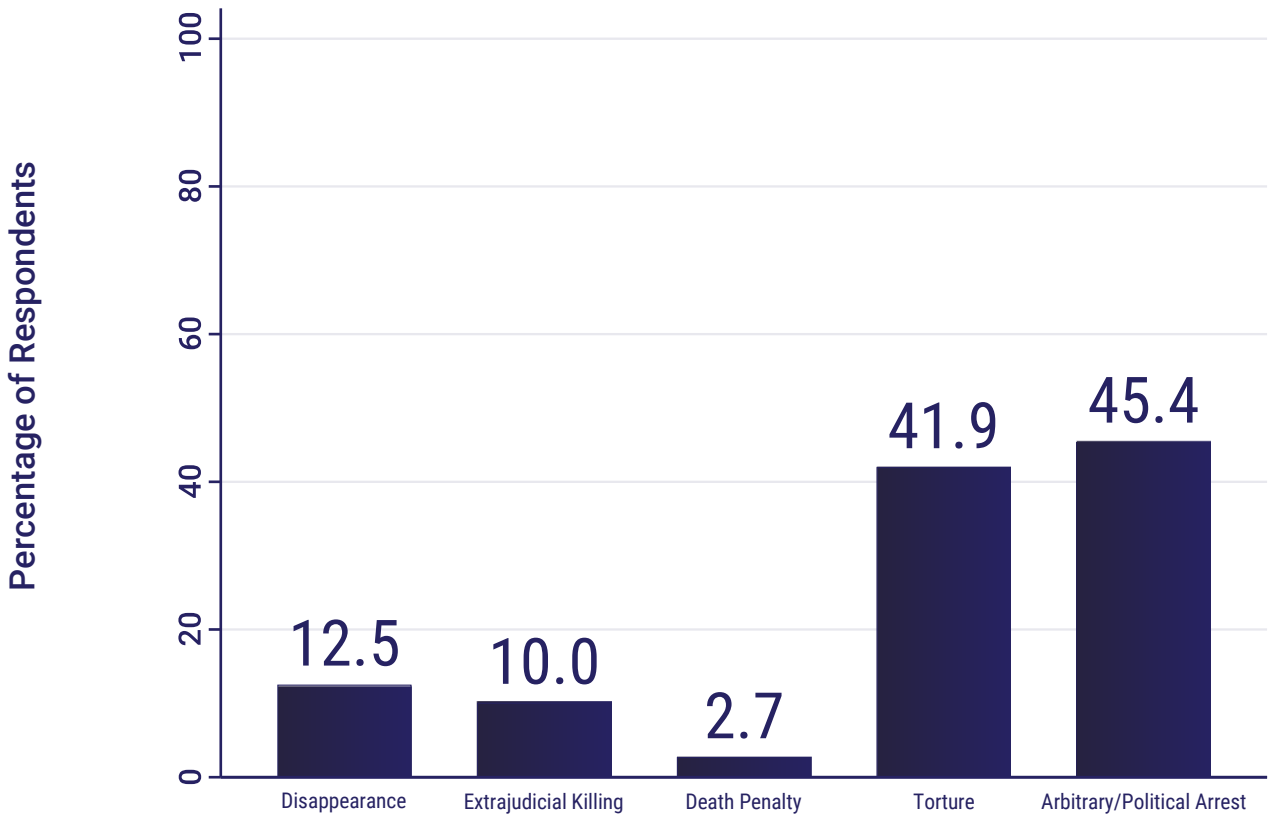
When asked about physical integrity rights, respondents in nearly every country said that Covid-19 had made the human rights landscape worse.

Figure 10: For physical integrity rights, human rights were affected in nearly every country



When asked which physical integrity rights were most affected, human rights experts said all five of the rights we measure were affected. Experts most commonly identified freedom from arbitrary arrest and freedom from torture and ill-treatment as affected by Covid-19.

Figure 11: The physical integrity rights that were most commonly identified as being adversely affected by Covid-19 were the right to freedom from arbitrary or political arrest and detention and the right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment



Right to freedom from arbitrary arrest

Everyone has the right to freedom from arbitrary or political arrest and detention.



Everyone has the right to freedom from arrest or detention for: reasons not established by law; inability to fulfil a contractual obligation; thoughts, beliefs, conscience, or religion; opinions or their peaceful expression; participation in peaceful assembly; peaceful association with others, including trade union membership; or identity, including 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part II, Article 2; Part III, Articles 9, 11, 18 19, 21, 22 & 26).

On average, across the 39 countries surveyed, 45.4% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to be free from arbitrary or political arrest and detention.

This is the physical integrity right most often chosen by respondents. In many places, the context for the increase in rights breaches is that a government places restrictions on movement, leading to more interactions between police and the public, including improper police behaviour. There are also reports of governments using pandemic restrictions to violate rights for other reasons.

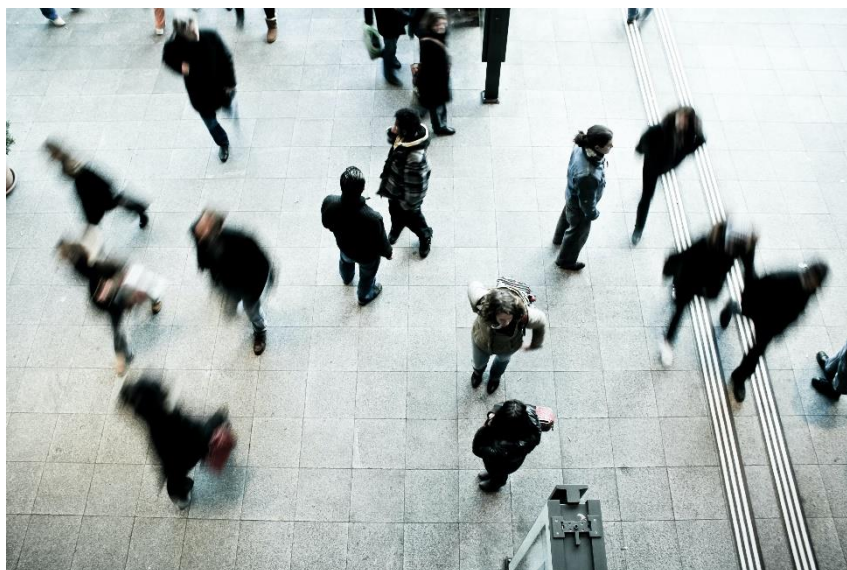
As with the previous sections, the examples in brackets are countries where experts made specific comments about these issues in their survey answers. It is likely in most cases that these things also happened in other countries.

- Under Covid-19 restrictions, protesters were at risk of arbitrary detention and police violence (eg, Australia, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan)

- Migrants were targeted in policies focused on controlling the spread of Covid-19 and were detained in unsanitary conditions (eg, Malaysia)
- People who violated or did not comply with curfews, lockdowns, geographic restrictions, and safety measures such as social distancing and mask-wearing were at greater risk of arbitrary arrest (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Jordan, Venezuela, Mozambique, Nepal)
- People were put in detention under the accusation of spreading information about Covid-19 considered untruthful by the government (eg, Vietnam)
- Doctors and healthcare workers who released Covid-19 statistics that contradicted government-issued information, or who otherwise criticised government handling of the pandemic, were at risk of arbitrary arrest (eg, Venezuela)
- Members of the opposition, activists, and people with particular political affiliations were detained, and their arrests could not be contested due to the state of emergency issued during the pandemic (eg, Jordan)
- People with lower incomes, many of whom have informal jobs, who violated Covid-19 restrictions were detained (eg, Liberia, Mozambique, Solomon Islands)
- Homeless people who violated lockdowns and curfews were arrested (eg, Angola)
- Legal proceedings were halted, leaving detainees waiting for trial for prolonged periods (eg, Malaysia)
- Detained activists were not among those released from prison due to the pandemic (eg, Mozambique)
- Cases of police abuse happened during arrests of people who violated Covid-19 restrictions (eg, Mozambique, United Kingdom)
- There was an impression that governments used supposed violations of Covid-19 restrictions, such as lockdowns, to arbitrarily arrest people (eg, Nepal)
- People investigating corruption and the misuse of public resources during the pandemic were targeted for arrest (eg, Nepal)
- Immigration processing times increased during the pandemic, leading to asylum seekers being detained for more extended periods (eg, New Zealand)
- Activists opposing the government faced a higher risk of being arbitrarily arrested after Covid-19 restrictions were issued (eg, Papua New Guinea)
- People, such as social media personalities, who commented on the spread of the pandemic and the government handling of it were arrested but eventually released (eg, Saudi Arabia)

Right to freedom from disappearance

Everyone has the right to freedom from forced disappearance.



Everyone has the right to freedom from 'arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty' followed by a lack of acknowledgement that this has occurred or 'concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person'. Disappearances include all cases in which people are taken and their location or status is unclear, including those known to be held in secret and/or incommunicado detention International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Part I, Article 2).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 12.5% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to be free from disappearance.

Government responses to Covid-19 also had repercussions on the right to freedom from disappearance. The qualitative data from the 2021 survey give some examples.

- Covid-19 policies led prisoners and detainees to be in situations of de facto incommunicado detention (eg, Kazakhstan)
- Due to the pandemic, disappearances often were less noticed, and police forces displayed a lack of diligence in investigating them (eg, Mexico, Mozambique)
- Some journalists who reported on Covid-19 and whose coverage contradicted what the government said about Covid-19 were subject to forced disappearance (eg, Venezuela)

Right to freedom from the death penalty

Everyone has the right to be free from execution under the death penalty.



The right to be free from execution includes freedom from any arbitrary or extrajudicial deprivation of life, as well as freedom from the death penalty even with due process of law (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part III, Article 6; Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, Article 1).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 2.7% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to be free from the death penalty.

The physical integrity right to freedom from the death penalty was the right least affected in the countries we investigated, partly because it is not practised at all in 35 of the 39 countries in the sample. Countries that use the death penalty generally continued executions even with lockdowns, curfews, and other Covid-19 restrictions in force.

- Covid-19 has not stopped the death penalty from being used (eg, Taiwan)
- Federal executions grew in number (eg, United States)

Right to freedom from extrajudicial execution

Everyone has the right not to be killed by state agents.



The right to be free from execution includes freedom from any arbitrary or extrajudicial deprivation of life, as well as freedom from the death penalty even with due process of law (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part III, Article 6; Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, Article 1).

Across the 39 countries surveyed, 10% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to be free from extrajudicial execution, particularly because of increased police enforcement activity and as part of government suppression of free speech.

Respondents reported only small changes due to Covid-19, but it is worth noting that in many countries, extrajudicial killing was already a serious problem before the pandemic. See the Rights Tracker for individual country scores for respecting the right to freedom from extrajudicial killing.

Respondents mentioned these circumstances as being specifically connected to the pandemic:

- People who fail to comply with Covid-19 safety measures, such as mask-wearing or curfews, were at greater risk of extrajudicial execution (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Healthcare workers who released Covid-19 statistics that contradicted the government were at greater risk of extrajudicial execution (eg, Venezuela)

Right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment

Everyone has the right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment.



Everyone has the right to freedom from 'any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person'. This includes torture or ill-treatment committed for any purpose, including (but not limited to) attempts to obtain information or confessions, punishment for suspected or committed acts, intimidation, coercion, and discrimination (Convention Against Torture, Part 1, Article 1)

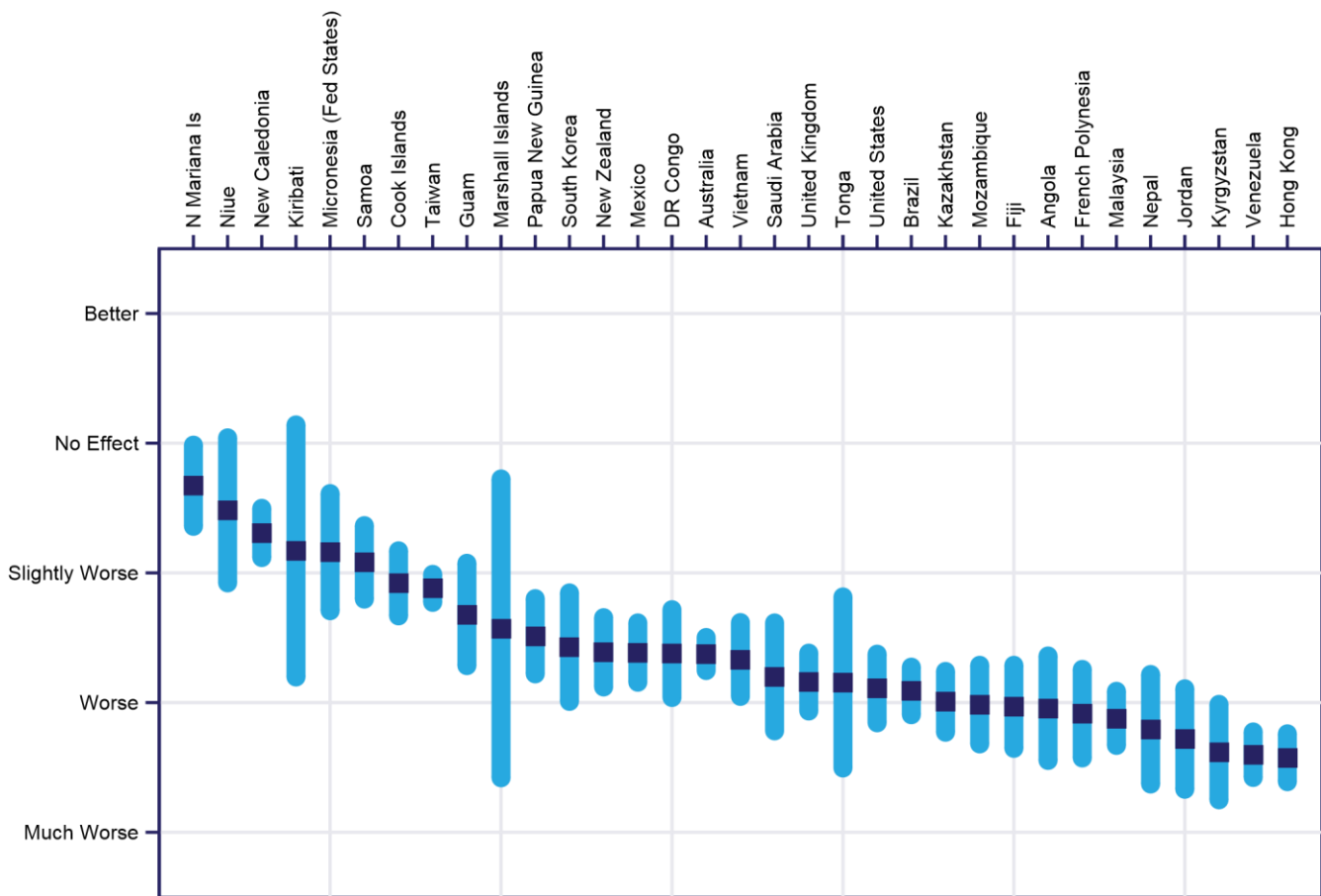
In the 39 countries surveyed, 41.9% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to be free from torture and ill-treatment.

The lockdowns, curfews, or other restrictions that governments imposed in response to Covid-19 significantly impacted groups already at risk, and brought more people into contact with police which too often led to torture and ill-treatment. Additionally, many countries failed to adequately address the pandemic, leading to unnecessary suffering. The qualitative responses from the 2021 survey include the following:

- People who failed to comply with Covid-19 restrictions were often at greater risk of suffering torture or ill-treatment (eg, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Taiwan, Venezuela, Nepal, Liberia, Fiji)
- Police abuse and torture rose during the pandemic towards more vulnerable groups (eg, Angola, Jordan, Malaysia, Venezuela)
- Vulnerable groups were at risk due to the poor handling of the pandemic (eg, Brazil) Undocumented migrants and refugees were detained in unsanitary conditions during the pandemic (eg, Malaysia)
- People placed in protective quarantine were subjected to what was seen as two weeks in solitary confinement (eg, Australia)
- People who needed a medical-based exemption from particular activities could not gain the exemption from doctors because they were unable to print the necessary documents (eg, Kyrgyzstan)
- General conditions of prisons worsened during the pandemic (eg, New Zealand)
- People who released information that contradicted official information by the state were at greater risk of being tortured (eg, Venezuela)
- Monitoring of social media during the pandemic led to a greater risk for those who oppose the government (eg, Mozambique)

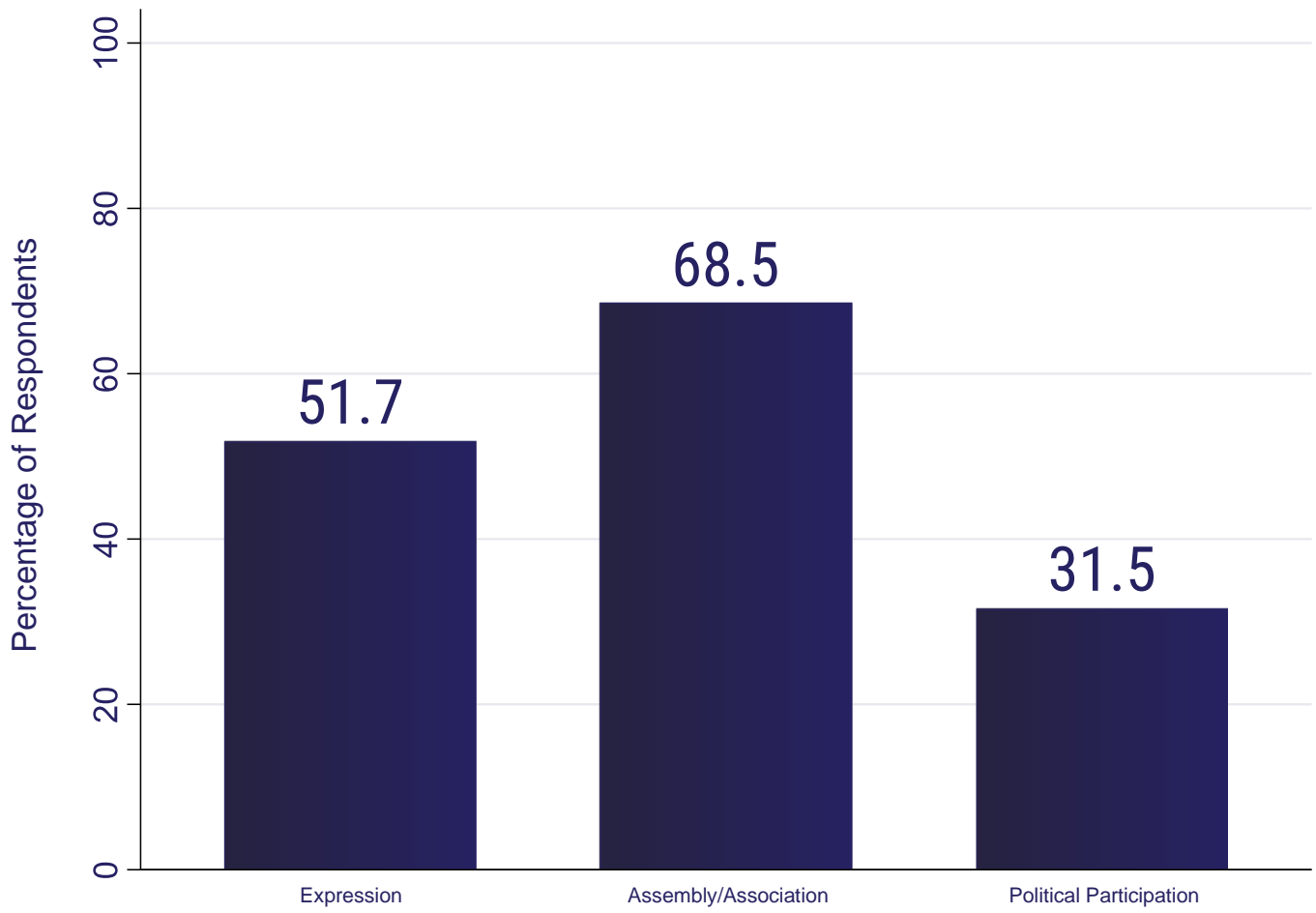
Empowerment rights

When asked about empowerment rights, respondents in every country said that Covid-19 had made the human rights landscape worse. Figure 12: For empowerment rights, human rights were affected negatively in every country



When asked which empowerment rights were affected, human rights experts said all three of the rights we measure were badly affected. Over two-thirds of the experts identified the right to assembly and association as being affected for the worse.

Figure 13: All empowerment rights were adversely affected by Covid-19



Right to assembly and association

Everyone has the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association.



The right to peaceful assembly ensures that all people have the right to gather publicly or privately to engage in peaceful meetings, protests, or other group gatherings. Freedom of association ensures that everyone may choose (or not) to form and/or join any group, such as political parties, civil society organisations, activist organisations, trade unions, religious groups, cultural organisations, or other groups (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part III, Articles 21 and 22).

Across the 39 countries surveyed, 68.5% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to freedom of assembly and association - the highest number in the Empowerment category. Respondents in every country characterised the situation as worse because of the pandemic.

Public health responses to the pandemic had an immediate impact on people's rights to gather together. Many countries enacted lockdowns, curfews, or other restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly. These restrictions were direct public health responses to the pandemic, but they often went beyond what was necessary, were enforced unevenly, and/or had unintended consequences for other rights, such as the right to food, and the right to participate in government.

- There was a perception that the government was using the pandemic as an excuse to impose restrictions (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nepal, Solomon Islands)
- There was a perception that restrictions continued to be imposed when they were no longer necessary (eg, Taiwan, United Kingdom)

- Restrictions were enforced using security forces and/or police violence (eg, Liberia, Mexico, United States)
- Pro-government demonstrations were allowed, while anti-government demonstrations were not (eg, Brazil, Kazakhstan)
- Restrictions on protest gatherings were unevenly enforced, depending on political alignment and/or the subject of the protest (eg, Australia, United States)
- Restrictions on gatherings were unevenly enforced, with Indigenous people targeted more than others (eg, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia)
- The political opposition was particularly targeted for restrictions (eg, Kazakhstan)
- Restrictions led to postponed elections (eg, Angola)
- Young people, Indigenous people, and people from ethnic minorities were more often targeted for curfew enforcement (eg, Australia)
- Restrictions affected people's ability to meet their economic and social needs (eg, Guam, Liberia)
- Businesses faced fewer restrictions on numbers of people in the workplace, while other gatherings were restricted (eg, Hong Kong)
- Union members were restricted from engaging in political activity (eg, Jordan)
- Restrictions affected the right to education for children and young people, as schools and other youth facilities were closed (eg, Liberia, United Kingdom)
- Restrictions affected people's ability to gather for religious purposes (eg, American Samoa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Vietnam)
- Disabled and/or elderly people living in residential care facilities were prevented from leaving their homes even when there was no official lockdown (eg, New Zealand)
- Borders were closed, preventing non-nationals from entering (eg, Taiwan)
- Borders were closed, restricting people's ability to leave the country (eg, Nauru)
- There was an increase in the use of technology to restrict assembly and movement, and for general surveillance of those deemed a threat (eg, Kazakhstan)
- Public health tracking measures created a sense of state surveillance (eg, Taiwan)
- People arrested for lawful demonstrations during the pandemic were put at risk of contracting Covid-19, due to insufficient space in detention (eg, United States)

Right to freedom of opinion and expression

Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression.



The right to opinion and expression includes the 'freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds' through any media, including any form of artistic expression. This right also protects 'a free, uncensored, and unhindered press or other media' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part III, Article 19; Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34, para. 13).

Across the 39 countries surveyed, 51.7 % said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Some governments enacted restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression as part of public health measures, particularly the restriction of public gatherings and protests to express opinions - this means, naturally, that there is some overlap between this section and the coverage of the right to freedom of assembly and association. In some places these restrictions or other government conduct had a chilling effect on public discourse. Some governments failed to provide access to accurate and necessary public health information. In some places, journalists were prevented from reporting, and/or were at heightened risk of physical or other attack.

- Governments imposed extra restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression during the pandemic (eg, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia)
- There was a perception that the government was using the pandemic as an excuse to impose restrictions (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kazakhstan, Malaysia)

- Demonstrations, protests, and public meetings and hearings were banned or restricted (eg, Kazakhstan, Taiwan, United Kingdom)
- Restrictions were enforced by police and security forces, and offenders were sometimes imprisoned (Kazakhstan)
- The public lacked accurate information about Covid-19 (eg, Brazil, Mexico)
- The government discouraged and/or punished people for criticising the government's handling of the pandemic (eg, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia) The government was not sufficiently open about the national Covid-19 situation (eg, Brazil)
- The government spread misinformation about Covid-19 and related matters (eg, Brazil)
- Restrictions on spreading misinformation were too broad (eg, Kazakhstan, Taiwan, Vietnam)
- There were restrictions on journalists on what investigations they could carry out, and what information about Covid-19 could be published (eg, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu)
- Journalists were discouraged and/or prevented from critiquing the government response to Covid-19, and/or the government generally (eg, Angola, Brazil, Jordan, Malaysia, Nepal, Taiwan, Tonga, United States)
- The government targeted journalists, academics, healthcare professionals, and others who spoke out against the government handling of the pandemic, or who contradicted government messages. Female journalists were particularly targeted (eg, Brazil, United States, Venezuela)
- Healthcare professionals were restricted in what they could say about Covid-19 and/or the government's response to it, and/or punished for speaking out (eg, Angola, Brazil, Kyrgyzstan, Solomon Islands, Taiwan)
- The pandemic made it more difficult for civil society to defend these freedoms (eg, American Samoa, Democratic Republic of Congo)
- The government used Covid-19 restrictions on freedom of expression to silence migrants and refugees, and their advocates (eg, Malaysia)
- Restrictions were enforced unevenly, depending on the content of the opinion (eg, Hong Kong)
- The economic downturn affected political participation as many organisations faced budget cuts (eg, Kazakhstan)

Right to participate in government

Everyone has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs.



Everyone has the right 'to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives'; 'to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections' in which every person can vote, every vote counts equally, and the ballot is secret; 'to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service.' These rights are to be enjoyed without discrimination and without 'unreasonable restrictions' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Part III, Article 25).

In the 39 countries surveyed, 31.5% of respondents said that Covid-19 had affected people's enjoyment of their right to political participation.

Many of the rights violations were in the context of elections, but general political participation was also affected. The impacts reported by our respondents are listed below with reference to the countries where our respondents reported these occurrences.

- Covid-19 restrictions on movement and assembly affected people's level of political participation (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo, Hong Kong, Mexico, Taiwan)
- Elections were delayed or cancelled because of Covid-19 (eg, Hong Kong, New Zealand) Public health safeguards during elections were insufficient, and political participation went down (eg, Brazil, Jordan)
- Practical adaptations during elections were insufficient, and political participation went down (eg, United States)
- Covid-19 restrictions hindered electoral processes (eg, Brazil, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia) Heavy punishments for breaches of Covid-19 restrictions made people afraid to go out to vote (eg, Jordan)

- Authorities cut election monitoring (eg, Kazakhstan)
- There was a perception that the government used Covid-19 as an excuse to restrict political participation (eg, Democratic Republic of Congo, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, United States)
- Officials' terms of office were extended (eg, United Kingdom)
- When elections were held during the pandemic, some changes of process, such as the use of online voting, led to tampering (eg, Kazakhstan)
- Elected bodies (parliaments, councils, and so on) were unable to meet as scheduled due to Covid-19 (eg, Fiji, Malaysia, Nepal)
- People who contracted Covid-19 were less able to exercise their rights (eg, Jordan, Taiwan) The economic downturn affected political participation as many organisations faced budget cuts (eg, Kazakhstan)
- The pandemic lowered political participation among women and girls (eg, Mozambique) Children and young people were not consulted about significant changes to school exams and grading practices (eg, United Kingdom)



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