

Research for Policy and Practice Report Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE)

Effective governance responses to crises: Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic

Foreword

In times of crisis, decision-making becomes paramount, yet it is often influenced by two distinct behavioural patterns: analysis paralysis and risk aversion. Drawing a parallel between the studies presented in this brief, it is possible to discern the interplay of analysis paralysis and risk aversion within institutional responses to crises.

The research from the African School of Economics (ASE) examines the phenomenon of analysis paralysis within the context of democratic institutions. It highlights the correlation between democratic rights and long-term economic prosperity while cautioning against the negative consequences of reversing these rights. The study delves into potential mechanisms contributing to the deterioration of democratic institutions during crises, including limited collective action and the acceptance of repressive policies. By analysing survey results from Benin, Burkina Faso, and South Africa, the research uncovers varying degrees of acceptance of perceived repressive policies and willingness to protest, shedding light on the vulnerability of democratic institutions when faced with analysis paralysis. These findings underscore the importance of addressing decision-making bottlenecks, encouraging timely action, and fostering an environment where collective action is possible.

Contrasting this, the research from Colabora.Lat focuses on the impact of risk aversion in institutional responses to the pandemic. The findings emphasise the importance of collaboration, highlighting how governments and various actors working together can effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by crises. Through the lens of risk aversion, the study explores how collaboration enabled governments to combine resources, knowledge, and experiences to produce unified messages and mitigate the worst health impacts. It showcases the successes observed in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico, where collaborative governance fostered effective policy outcomes, including lower mortality rates.

By combining the insights from these texts, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by institutions during times of crisis. Acknowledging the potential pitfalls of analysis paralysis and the transformative potential of collaborative responses, policymakers and decision makers can navigate crises with more agility, ensuring the preservation of democratic institutions and mechanisms while effectively addressing the health and socioeconomic impacts of crises.

Considering the insights garnered, a few policy recommendations can be proposed to address the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities to respond more effectively to future crises. First, to promote timely decision-making, policymakers should prioritise enhancing institutional agility. This can be achieved through the implementation of mechanisms that streamline decision-making processes, such as clear guidelines for crisis response, efficient coordination structures, and regular evaluation of the effectiveness



Beatriz Urgiles, an indigenous woman and defender of water, holds the flag of Ecuador while participating in the 'National March for Democracy'.
 PHOTO: JOHIS ALARCON/PANOS PICTURES

of democratic institutions. By reducing bureaucratic hurdles and fostering a culture of proactive decision-making, institutions can overcome analysis paralysis and respond swiftly to emerging crises. Furthermore, promoting transparency and open dialogue with citizens can enhance public trust and engagement, facilitating collective action and minimising the likelihood of institutional deterioration during crises.

Second, based on the significance of collaboration in effective crisis response highlighted by Colabora.Lat, policymakers should prioritise fostering collaborative governance structures. This can be achieved by creating platforms for meaningful engagement and dialogue between governments, civil society organisations, private sector entities, and other relevant stakeholders. Encouraging collaboration can enable the pooling of resources, expertise, and experiences necessary for comprehensive crisis management. It is essential to establish long-term collaborative relationships rather than short-term endeavors to sustain the positive outcomes achieved through collaboration. Additionally, initiatives to build trust and strengthen partnerships between institutions and stakeholders can help overcome risk aversion and promote a collective approach to crisis response.

In conclusion, policy recommendations derived from these texts underscore the importance of addressing analysis paralysis, enhancing institutional agility, and promoting collaboration in crisis response. By adopting these recommendations, policymakers can foster resilience, improve decision-making, and effectively navigate the complexities of crises. It is through proactive and collaborative efforts that societies can better prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises, ensuring the preservation of democratic institutions and the wellbeing of their populations.

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The vulnerability to institutional change during times of crisis

During the Covid-19 pandemic, democratic institutions deteriorated in many countries around the world. Democratic rights have been shown to be correlated with long run economic prosperity (Acemoglu et al. 2019). However, the reversal of democratic rights can have negative consequences that last for generations, as the persistence of institutions impedes their reinstatement (Wantchékon and García-Ponce 2013).

There are many potential explanations for this deterioration, two of which are explored in this brief. First, it may be that the pandemic created an environment with limited willingness and ability to oppose repressive government policy through traditional forms of collective action such as mass protests. Second, there may be support for the temporary imposition of repressive government policies if such policies are seen as necessary to prevent the spread of the virus. Understanding these two explanations can help to understand the dynamics of institutional change and provide insight into which countries are vulnerable to a deterioration in their democratic institutions during times of crises. We theorise that countries with a high degree of acceptance of repressive policies and a low willingness to protest would be more vulnerable to a deterioration of democratic institutions during times of crisis.

In this brief we provide insight into these questions by presenting survey results in three African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, and South Africa. Overall, we find there is a high degree of acceptance of repressive policies in all three countries. The results indicate that there is the highest acceptance of repressive policies in Benin, followed by Burkina Faso, then South Africa. However, Benin also had the largest willingness to protest in response to a deterioration of democratic institutions, and Burkina Faso scores the lowest on three out of the four questions regarding willingness to protest. We therefore hypothesise that Burkina Faso is more vulnerable to institutional change as there is a moderately high acceptance of repressive policies and a lower willingness to protest in response to institutional changes.

Table 1 presents the results of the survey questions measuring the acceptance of repressive policy to prevent the spread of Covid-19. As seen in the table, Benin reports the highest percentage of people who support repressive policies followed by Burkina Faso and South Africa.

Table 1 Support for repressive policy to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus

	Benin (%)	Burkina Faso (%)	South Africa (%)
The government has the right to use force (violence) to break up a protest to prevent the spread of a virus like Covid-19.	68	50	45
The government should make protesting illegal to prevent the spread of a virus like Covid-19.	77	73	52
It is sometimes acceptable for the president to suspend the legislature when decisions need to be made quickly such as in a pandemic.	62	57	58

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

Table 2 presents the results of survey questions related to the willingness to protest a deterioration of democratic institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to protest about a series of issues. Here we

see that all countries have a stronger willingness to protest police violence against citizens compared to the other reasons offered. However, it should be noted that the percentage of people willing to protest is still quite low, and only a small portion of a country shows up to even the largest protests. Benin has the highest percentage of the surveyed population willing to protest the cancellation of an election or the exclusion of an opposition party from an election. Both South Africa and Benin have a high willingness to protest the changing of the constitution. Overall, Benin and South Africa display a greater willingness to protest the deterioration of democratic institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic relative to Burkina Faso.

Table 2 Willingness to protest during the Covid-19 pandemic

For what reasons would you be willing to protest during a pandemic like Covid-19?	Benin (%)	Burkina Faso (%)	South Africa (%)
Review of the constitution	11	9	12
Violence perpetrated by the police against citizens	17	19	19
Exclusion of opposition political parties from the elections	11	4	6
Cancellation or postponement of elections	10	6	8

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

Examining the results of Tables 1 and 2 provides some insight into the dynamics of institutional change during times of crisis. By comparing the acceptance of repressive policies seen in Table 1 with the willingness to protest seen in Table 2 we can understand how vulnerable a country is to a deterioration of democratic institutions during times of crisis. All three countries display a high level of acceptance of repressive policies. However, there is also a relatively high willingness to protest institutional change. It should be noted that the questions related to willingness to protest are hypothetical. It is unclear whether individuals would show up to a protest should the opportunity arise. Future work will examine the relationship between stated willingness to participate in protests and frequency of protests. It is also important to note that the two aspects of institutional change may be interrelated and correlated with a third factor. For example, cultural factors may determine both preferences for democratic institutions and willingness to participate in protests.

It is our hope that this research can provide insight to policymakers and the international community as to why some countries are more vulnerable to institutional change during times of crisis. Moreover, understanding whether change is originating as a result of acceptance or an inability to resist change can inform the international community's response to a deterioration of democratic rights. For example, if the change is originating as a result of a change in acceptance then limits on the duration of repressive policy could be implemented. This would allow the policies to exist and help avert the crisis while not allowing the repressive policies to become a permanent part of the country's institutional framework. Civil society can play an important role in educating people about the importance of making any restrictions on rights temporary. Alternatively, if the change is the result of unpopular government action that cannot be opposed by protest then the most appropriate course of action may be for the international community to work with the government to restore any rights that have been deteriorated.

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FURTHER READING

Acemoglu, D.; Naidu, S.; Restrepo, P. and Robinson, J.A. (2019) 'Democracy Does Cause Growth', *Journal of Political Economy* 127.1: 47-100

Wantchékon, L. and García-Ponce, O. (2013) *Critical Junctures: Independence Movements and Democracy in Africa*, Coventry: University of Warwick

Collaboration matters: Governance responses to Covid-19 in six Latin American countries

The Covid-19 pandemic has provoked a lot of uncertainty. It is dynamic and complex and requires a solution that many Latin American countries do not have at their disposal. Its impacts are better addressed by working across levels, areas, and organisations. Confronting Covid-19 requires collaboration.

Colabora.Lat is managed by a consortium comprising research-oriented universities and thinktanks in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico. It seeks to generate diagnostic and prognostic information about the impact of collaborative governance (CG) on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that have emerged during the pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities. Between October 2020 and December 2022, we conducted interviews, focus groups, workshops, and content analysis to gain preliminary insights about different governmental responses to the pandemic in Latin America.

The quantitative evidence produced through our creation of a **Collaborative Governance Index** (CGI) – which focuses on collaboration that occurs between national governments and other actors – suggests that governments that pursued collaboration were more effective in containing mortality rates at the beginning of the pandemic. For example, our research shows that there is a significant difference in mortality rates when national governments collaborated with social organisations on vaccine distribution. On average, where there was collaboration, the mortality rate per million was 493. Where collaboration did

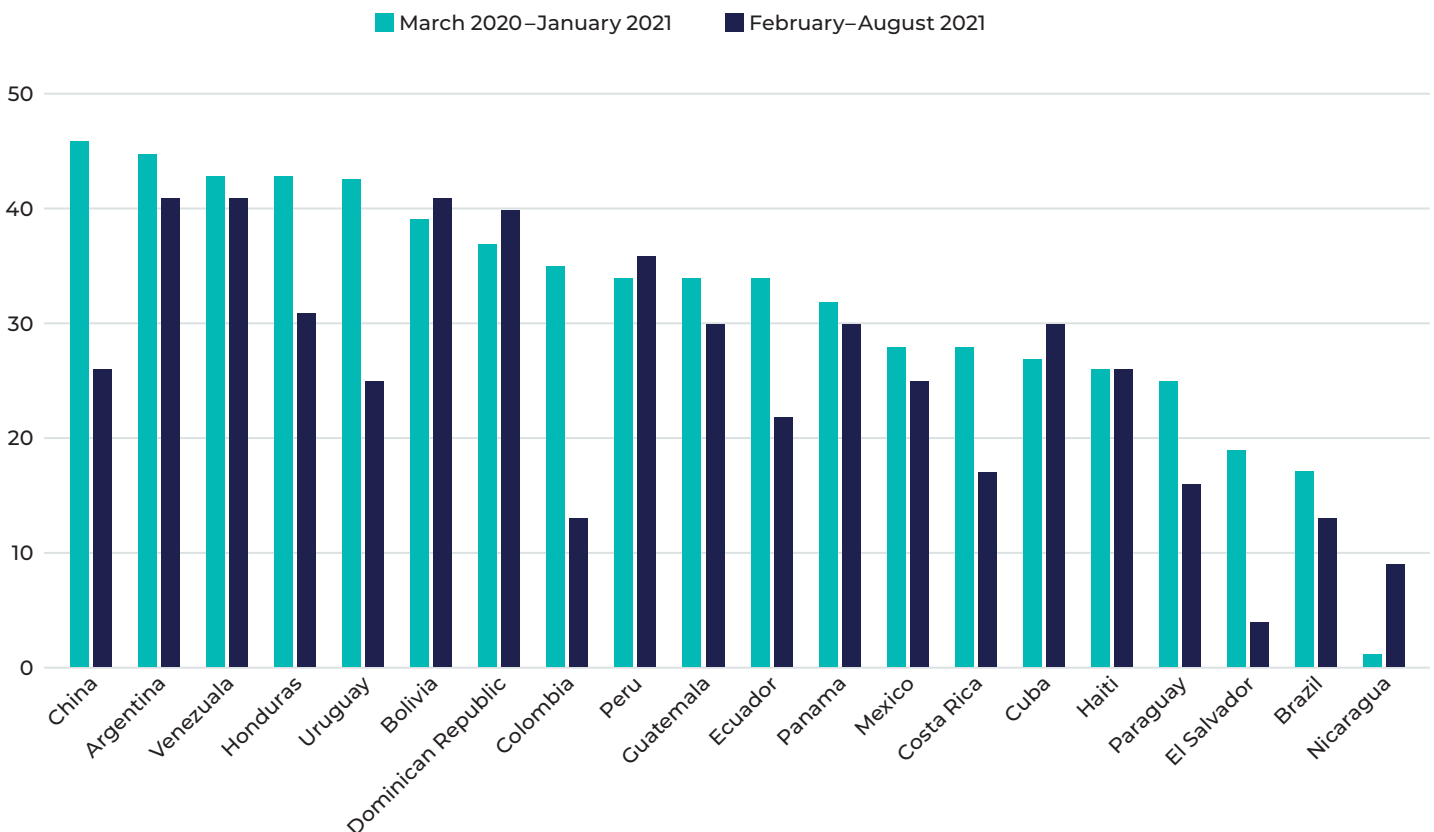
not occur, the rate was 839 per million (Cyr *et al.* 2021). This kind of collaboration occurred in Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Also, broadly speaking, when social organisations collaborated with national governments on detection, the number of deaths was significantly less compared to where there was no collaboration: 336 per million on average versus 864 per million. This kind of collaboration with social actors occurred in Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, Uruguay, and Venezuela (*ibid.*).

A close examination of the CGI reveals that the collaborative responses to the pandemic by the region's governments were not only diverse in their magnitude but also differed in terms of the actors involved. It is also notable that these collaborative relationships were difficult to sustain over time.

The data collected shows that from March 2020 (when the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic) until January 2021, the Latin American countries that showed the highest level of collaboration were Chile and Argentina, followed by Venezuela, Honduras and Uruguay. In contrast, El Salvador, Brazil and Nicaragua showed the lowest levels of collaboration in their policy responses to the pandemic. In this context, Nicaragua is an outlier in our aggregate index as it only received a total score of one. International sources were used for its analysis in the absence of local media. It is therefore excluded from the statistical analyses, although we maintain it in the descriptive statistics.

Figure 1 Collaborative Governance Index



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the [Collaborative Governance Index](#).

Chile generated more instances of exchange with scientific teams and independent researchers in the implementation of public policy, as well as with administrative and bureaucratic areas of government. Argentina, by contrast, showed more collaboration with social organisations and/or trade unions. Although Venezuela, Honduras and Uruguay have the same values in the index, they show internal differences in the number of actors that collaborated with the national government. Honduras and Venezuela show a higher level of business collaboration than Uruguay.

“When social organisations collaborated with national governments on detection, the number of deaths was significantly less compared to where there was no collaboration”

Apart from certain countries such as Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, there was a tendency in the region toward less collaborative exchanges in the second year of the pandemic. As explained below, collaboration can be effective, but it is difficult to sustain.

Our evidence suggests that collaboration allowed actors to cooperate rather than compete for resources. It also helped the government buy time to prepare for potential contagion waves and enabled actors to produce a unified message as to what citizens should do to prevent the spread of the virus. These findings provide evidence that collaboration matters to prevent the worst health outcomes. Intergovernmental collaboration and collaboration between the national government and social organisations or unions, in particular, were prominent dimensions of the collaboration.

From this analysis, as well as the in-depth research carried out in the six countries of the Colabora.Lat consortium, further conclusions emerge:

- Collaborative governance between government institutions privileged an epidemiological approach to decision-making rather than considering the inequalities arising from territorial differences, class, gender, race, and generation. The most urgent problems related to shortages of basic supplies, including masks, Covid-19 tests, alcohol gel, and hospital equipment, to treat the disease and prevent its spread. Thus, in all six countries, many of the collaborative initiatives focused on procuring and delivering these items. In Mexico, for example, our research shows that federal government policy was focused on containment rather than the protection of migrant human rights, a historical complex problem in the country.
- On the other hand, civil society has been active in assisting and accompanying populations in situations of vulnerability. These organisations tend to know these communities well and can articulate their specific needs.
- In most of the cases analysed, collaboration was mobilised for specific objectives. Consequently, collaborative governance models were not designed to last. For example, in Argentina, schools and the provincial state collaborated in the distribution of food and the organisation of vaccination and testing centres,

allowing the state to reach more people in the territory. Once the objectives were achieved, the collaborative relationship was not continued.

One explanation for the inability to continue the collaboration may be the absence of trust in governance institutions. For instance, in Guatemala, participants in youth organisations took pride in their principles of honour, ethics, and organisational coherence. However, by contrast, the public sector is not perceived as an ethical or virtuous actor, and so these youth organisations are reluctant to work with it.

Our findings will be published in a book that will analyse collaborative governance processes in Latin America, which aims to define a framework of good practices for governance, inclusion, and gender parity. Where governments address the pandemic by pooling resources, knowledge, and experiences of others – i.e., where they collaborate with different actors – policy effectiveness grows. Therefore, we conclude that the worst health impacts will be mitigated when collaborative governance is a part of official government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Knowing what happened in the years of the pandemic and delving deeper into the scenarios that strengthen or weaken collaboration between actors is fundamental to providing more solid responses to the future challenges we will face as a society.

The Collaborative Governance Index

We built an original data set that offers a novel attempt to operationalise collaborative governance (CG) at the country level for large-scale analysis. The Collaborative Governance Index (CGI) includes the interaction of the national executive with five different stakeholders. We calculated intergovernmental CG, which involves interactions between the national and subnational governments on Covid-19-based policy responses; institutional CG, which involves collaboration among national ministries and/or across national and subnational bureaucracies; CG in science and technology, which occurs between national government and independent experts and scientists; social CG, which occurs between national government and social movements and unions; and corporate CG, which occurs between national government and private companies.

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FURTHER READING

Cyr, J.; Bianchi, M.; González, L. and Perini, A. (2021) ‘[Governing a Pandemic: Assessing the Role of Collaboration on Latin American Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis](#)’, *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 13.3: 290–327, DOI: [10.1177/1866802X211049250](#) (accessed 9 August 2023)

[Colabora.Lat Policy Briefs](#) (2021) (accessed 9 August 2023)

[Global Forum Colabora.Lat](#) (2021) (accessed 9 August 2023)

Emerson, K. and Nabatchi, T. (2015) [Collaborative Governance Regimes](#), Washington DC: Georgetown University Press (accessed 9 August 2023)

Project list

Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 on African Economies, Social Cohesion, and Governance: Evidence from Benin, Burkina Faso and South Africa

Partner: African School of Economics (ASE)

Research Partners: Groupe de Recherche et d'Analyse Appliquées pour le Développement; The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

This project will contribute to policies and strategies to address the immediate and longer-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on economies, social cohesion, and governance in Benin, Burkina Faso, and South Africa. The research team will investigate the negative income shock and state regulations resulting from the pandemic and their corresponding effects on social cohesion, governance, and violence (including violent extremism) in Africa. The project will contribute to enhancing collaboration between researchers in Africa and strengthen their contribution to the development of effective and rapid responses to the social and economic effects of the pandemic in Africa.

Further information: <https://c19re.org/project/socio-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-african-economies-social-cohesion-and-governance-evidence-from-benin-burkina-faso-and-south-africa/>

Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19

Partner: Asuntos del Sur

Research Partners: Diálogos Guatemala; Escuela de Política y Gobierno - Universidad Nacional de San Martín; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Bolivia); Nosotrxs; Universidad de Icesi; Universidad de Santiago de Chile

The 'Colabora.Lat: hacia un modelo de gobernanza post-Covid-19' project focuses on 1) understanding the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on social relations, trust, and collective action, especially among women and vulnerable populations, 2) identifying innovations in social mobilising, citizen participation, and campaigns that can be supported and scaled, and 3) an analysis of public policies in the region designed to protect vulnerable populations, with an emphasis on how these policies have incorporated innovative forms of public engagement and how they can be further strengthened through transparency, citizen participation, and other forms of good governance and collaboration.

Further information: <https://c19re.org/project/social-engagement-citizen-agency-and-governance-toward-a-new-democratic-consensus-in-post-pandemic-latin-america/>

Drawing on research from the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) initiative, this summary highlights key learning from the Covid-19 pandemic on effective decision-making during crises. Supported by the International Development Research Centre, CORE brings together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery. The research is being led primarily by local researchers, universities, thinktanks and civil society organisations across 42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

This output was published by the CORE Knowledge Translation Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. It was written in collaboration with CORE research teams from the African School of Economics (ASE) and Asuntos del Sur. It was collated by Jessica Meeker, Knowledge Officer (IDS). CORE's knowledge translation goals are to connect the research with policymakers and practitioners. The initiative is identifying synergies between projects and grant-holders, supporting researchers as they exploit influencing and engagement opportunities, and facilitating mutual learning.

 c19re.org

 [@IDS_UK](https://twitter.com/IDS_UK)

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