

## Finland's response to the crisis: trust in democratic institutions and science

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Finland has remained steadily at the top of democratisation indexes in recent decades and has performed well in international comparative studies regarding respect for the rule of law and media freedom. Finland is a country with deep-rooted democratic traditions; it is therefore unlikely that electoral democracy will lose its appeal in the foreseeable future.

Finland is also country with high levels of political trust. The management of the pandemic has enjoyed strong public approval and the country is regarded as one of Europe's success stories in dealing with the pandemic, measured by the very low Covid-19 prevalence and mortality levels.

Much international attention has focused on the young female Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, in particular her personal leadership skills. Finns also place their firm trust and confidence in science and research, which has contributed to this good performance and strong public support for vaccinations.

Since the beginning of the health crisis, the political opposition, the media and citizens have exercised vigilance and actively called for more transparency and clarity in the political decisionmaking

surrounding the pandemic – features that are symptomatic of a healthy democracy.

The crisis has however brought at least three challenges to the functioning of democracy.

First, Parliament has been flooded with legal amendments since the government considered that the legislative framework was not optimal for dealing with the crisis. Heightened public attention to legal drafting has made it visible that the process suffers from general problems of quality that are not only related to overcoming the acute crisis.

Second is the need to strengthen the government's crisis management communication from a one-way issuing of instructions and advice type top down to a model that allows a two-way interaction with the people. This is important for a sense of inclusion and participation, to ensure that no one is left behind and that the electorate continues to vote.

Third, the postponement of municipal elections from April to June 2021, due to the pandemic, is seen as a governmental failure to prepare for this scenario. The difficulty of organising elections in exceptional times has also reminded the population of the absence of e-voting systems.

In sum, Finnish society has proved to be very resilient in the face of the current pandemic, and the successful national response has the potential to further strengthen support for the existing political order. The pandemic has also helped to identify challenges to building better crisis preparedness and management systems in the future.