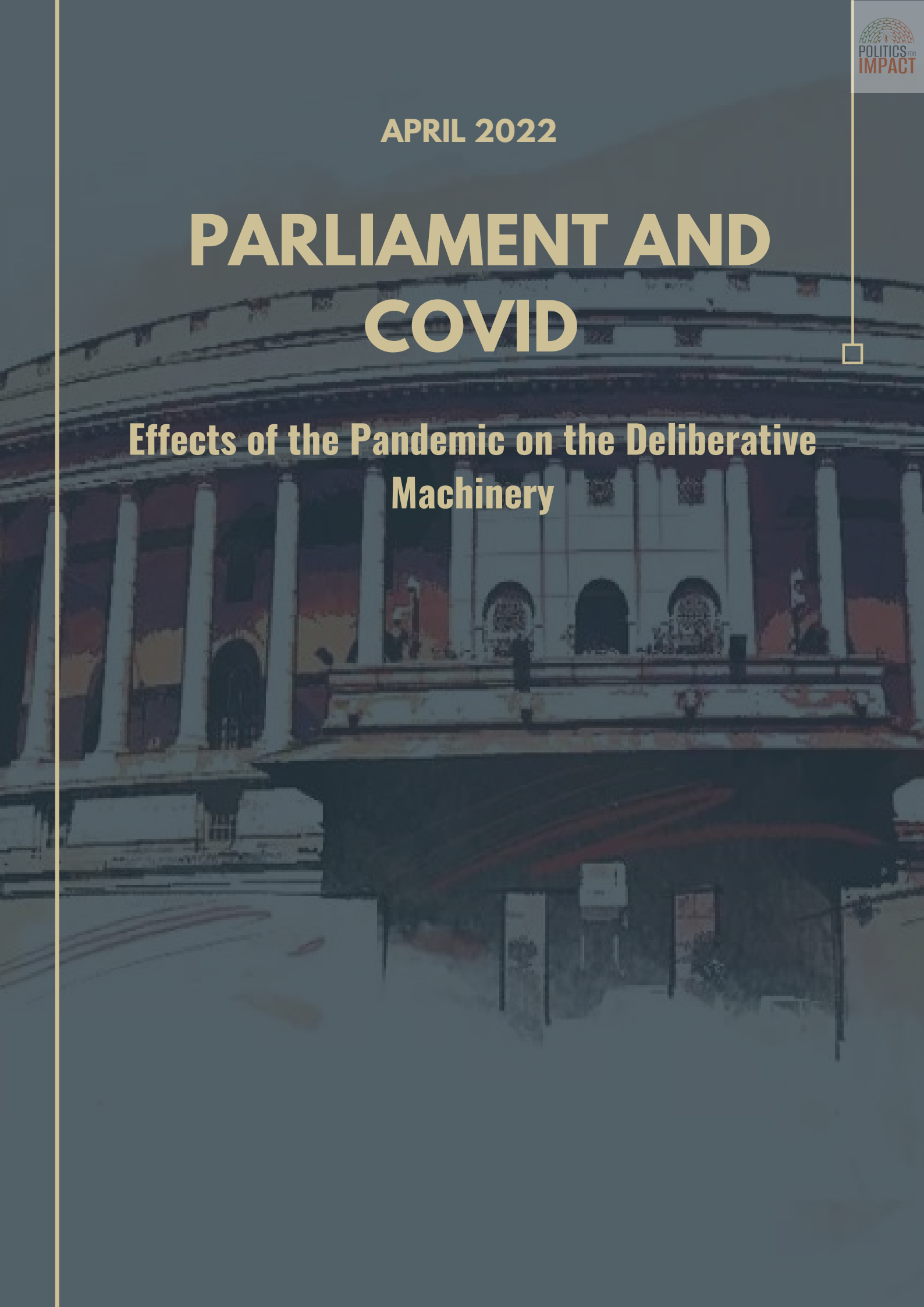


APRIL 2022

PARLIAMENT AND COVID

Effects of the Pandemic on the Deliberative Machinery





ABOUT POLITICS FOR IMPACT

Politics for Impact actively engage with young and dynamic public representatives working for the welfare of their constituents, by engaging with various stakeholders including non-profits, think tanks, media houses, student bodies, labor unions. We provide support to elected leaders to aid them in performing their legislative duties and creating reforms in the public policy of the country. In the process, we aim to shape young policy and political leaders who will transform politics and policy in India.

IMPACT INTERNSHIP

This internship provides opportunities for young dynamic individuals to work at the confluence of policy and politics by developing the skills of legislative research. It provides practical insights into the working of the Indian Parliament and its interventions. Apart from this interns are given the freedom to learn various contemporary skills including political speech, writing, policy analysis, etc. It is a space for like-minded youth to engage, learn and discuss relevant public policy issues. For more information visit our website <https://www.politicsforimpact.com/impact-internship>

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DISCLAIMER

The views and analysis contained in this Discussion Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of any political party or public representative.

FOREWORD

During the pandemic, staying home and keeping safe was every nation's priority. In the Indian context, large amounts of public funds were utilized to provide basic necessities for the less fortunate. This meant increased responsibility for me as a legislator to hold the Government accountable. Parliament is one such place that helps me perform my duty to the people and question the Government on its actions. However, postponement of Parliament sessions limited the ability of legislators to elicit a response from the Government, to discuss what could be the best way forward to come out of the pandemic or to do stock-taking of our response to the pandemic so far.

Taking the above context into consideration, this report provides insights regarding the functioning of Parliaments around the world and the mechanisms used by them to cope with the pandemic. This report provides an understanding of India's Parliamentary performance during COVID-19 compared to world parliaments and other such deliberative bodies. Apart from this, the description of steps taken by world Parliaments to combat the pandemic has introduced me to innovative measures. This will be a handy resource to share & discuss with Parliamentarians and the Union Government as well.

I would also like to congratulate Politics for Impact and its first batch of interns for putting together a comprehensive analysis of world parliaments. I would also like to appreciate the teams' mentors for providing the necessary guidance. Awaiting more such in-depth analyses on relevant topics from Politics for Impact.

Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu
Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha)
Srikakulam
5th April, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic has been the leveler in parliamentary functioning across the world. Complex questions about the role and functioning of legislatures were brought into the limelight over the last year and a half. Including whether the pandemic is being used as an excuse to marginalize the legislature and proceed without scrutiny¹. We believe the pandemic presents difficulties for legislative oversight, particularly against the backdrop of the executive assuming wide-reaching powers and against a steep decline in adherence to democratic values and the rise of populism globally. Yet understandably, parliaments worldwide have been differently abled in their capacity to deliver.

The purpose of this report is twofold:

- (1) to assess the extent to which legislatures were affected over the pandemic years, using statistical analysis tools and
- (2) to analyze how they adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To accommodate the uniqueness of each country's parliament, the size of the house was chosen as the benchmark for analysis. By analyzing data from the lower houses of different parliaments, we seek to explore the extent to which innovative mechanisms were utilized - technology-based and otherwise - to ensure continuity in parliamentary functioning. Parliaments have primarily resorted to logistically possible and pragmatic arrangements in most cases, performing exceedingly well in some instances and abysmally bad in others. Finally and notably, through the report, we seek to find out where India stands in upholding the core principles of legislative functioning, i.e., rational lawmaking, respect for human rights, the rule of law, et al.

¹ Ronan Cormacain & Ittai Bar-Siman-Tov, Legislatures in the Time of Covid-19, 8 The Theory and Practice of Legislation 3-9 (2020).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Average sittings pre covid - 86 days and post covid - 70 days.
- India's rank pre covid - 17th out of 29 and post covid - 26th out of 30
- Best 5 performers - **Poland, Spain, Japan, UK, and Switzerland.**
- Worst 5 performers - **Brazil, Afghanistan, Morocco, India, Canada**
- There was a general fall in performance across the board bar some exceptional cases.
- There was a variation in the gaps seen in sittings pre and post covid. **This might be indicative of the legislative adaptability to conduct sessions and functions in the pandemic era.**
- An example can be taken from countries that showed parliamentary resilience in the post-pandemic era.
- India - a positive aspect was that the data was easily accessible from the parliamentary website.
- The sessions post covid were cancelled, and the number of sittings was severely limited, due to which its rank worsened across pre and post covid years.
- Apart from showing legislative performance, the report acts as a reflection of legislative adaptability and provides examples for the reader/user/beneficiary to gain insights from it.

METHODOLOGY USED

The initial target was to have a dataset representation of 63 countries based on countries with at least 200 members in their Lower House. This was to compare the management of similarly sized Parliaments that would present us with comparable best practices for our analysis. However, the paucity of public access to data and poor design with many parliaments meant that it was later narrowed down to 30 countries due to the scarcity of data available online. India has 543* seats in its lower chamber, which made it a part of the dataset. While finalising this parameter, it was observed that while many parliaments that have a regular and efficiently functioning parliament are democracies, it is not a necessary prerequisite since non-democratic countries' parliaments can also adopt innovative methods for parliamentary functioning and perform better on procedural aspects of parliamentary functioning than democratic countries. The primary sources used were parliamentary websites of respective countries represented in the dataset. The secondary sources were primarily the Inter-Parliamentary Union website, international journals such as Al Jazeera and Reuters.

The database was based on the number of working days across sessions conducted by governments of nations across PRE COVID YEAR (2018-19) - COVID YEAR (2020-21). The year 2018-19 was chosen to compare the working of parliaments with the covid year to remain close to the pandemic functioning with no distortion in the market due to any fatal abnormality. Number of working days is the total number of days members of parliaments assemble virtually or physically in a designated institution such as Parliament building to conduct the business of the house. For the pre-covid year, the average value of countries considered for the study is 89.7, in comparison to the covid year 2020 for the same dataset is 69.8. The countries were ranked according to their performance against the specific year's average value. Then, we calculated the difference between the working days of a country in pre covid and covid year to evaluate whether their performance declined or improved or remained unaffected owing to the pandemic.

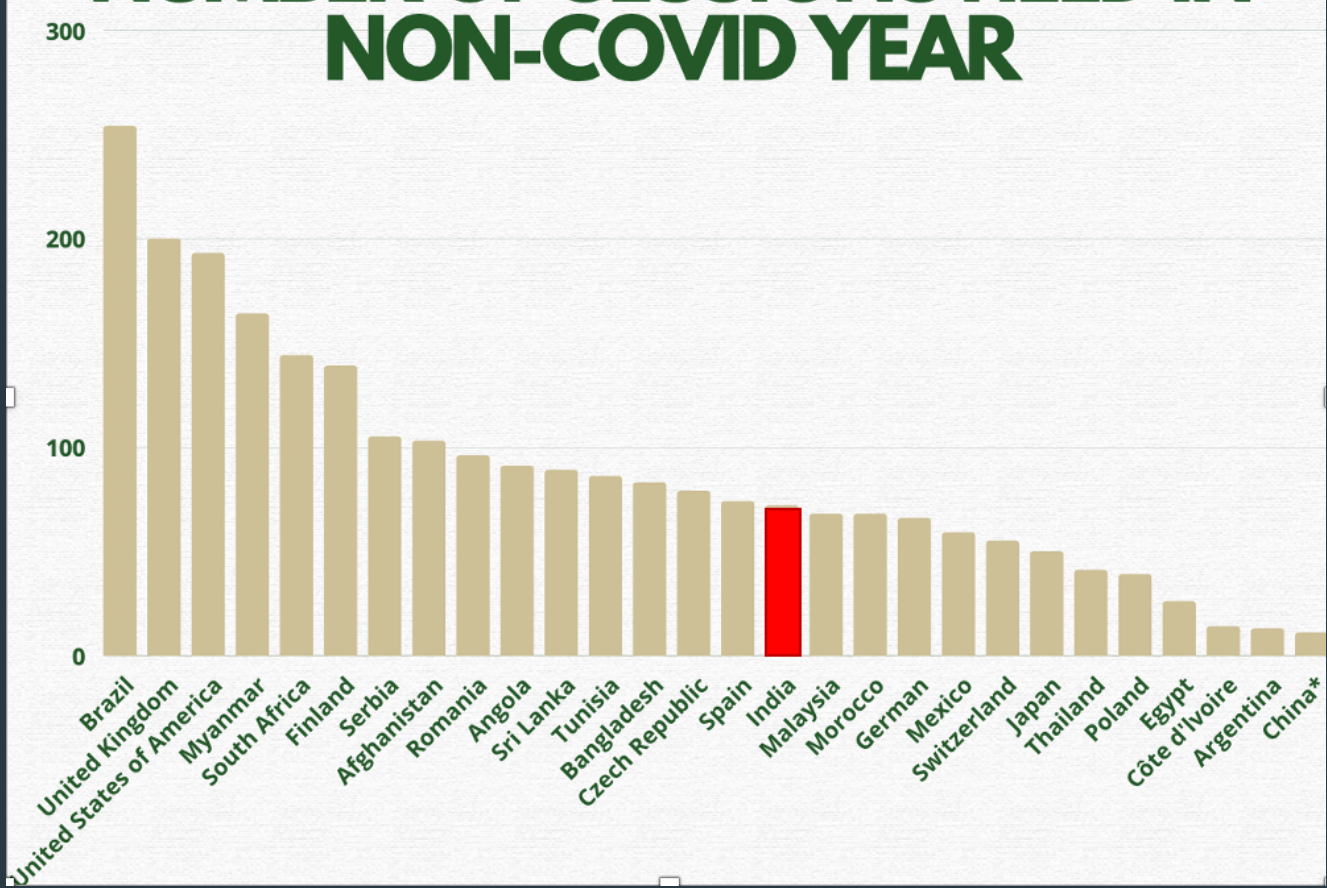
NON-COVID YEAR PERFORMANCE

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NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD IN NON-COVID YEAR



[Pre-Covid Year Parliamentary Sittings]

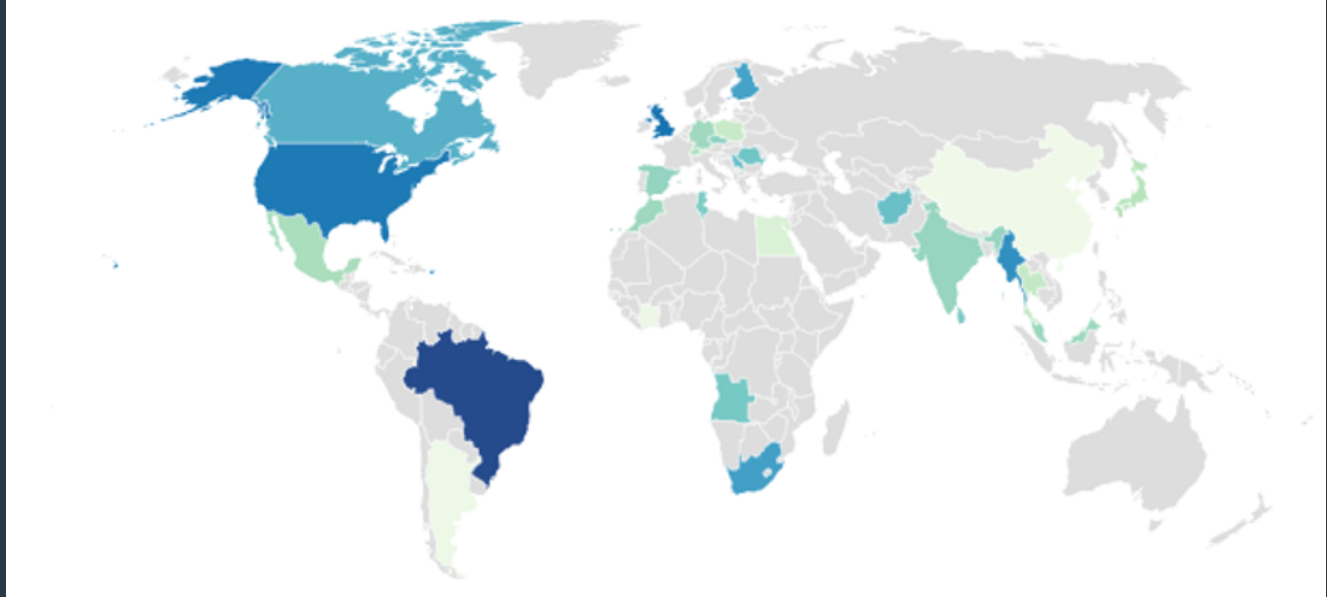


Chart showing a comparative reflection of Parliamentary Sittings in a pre-Covid year

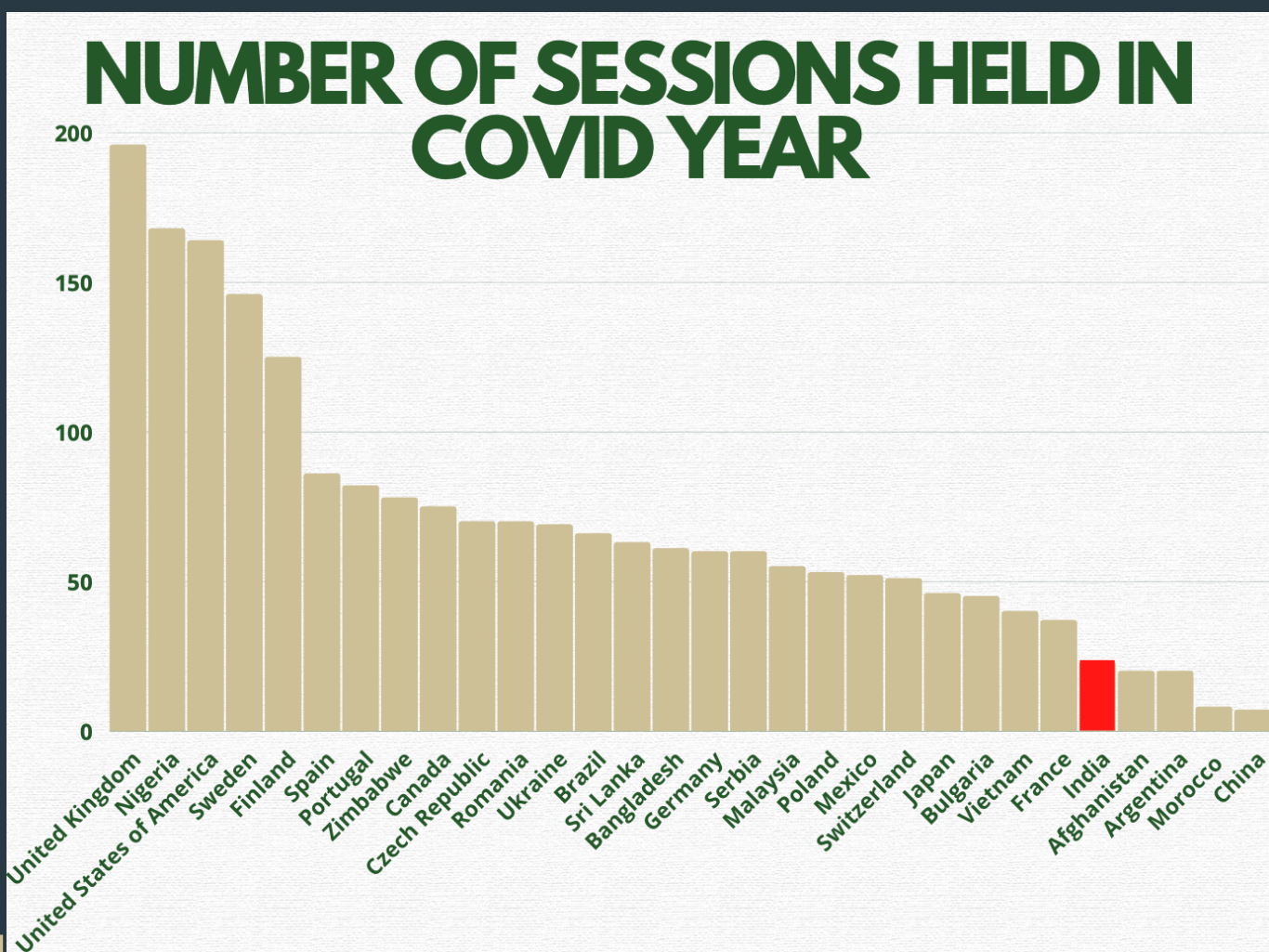
COUNTRY	NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD IN NON-COVID YEAR
Brazil	254
United Kingdom	200
United States of America	193
Myanmar	164
South Africa	144
Finland	139
Canada	122
Serbia	105
Afghanistan	103
Romania	96
Angola	91
Sri Lanka	89
Tunisia	86
Bangladesh	83
Czech Republic	79
Spain	74
India	72
Malaysia	68
Morocco	68
Germany	66
Mexico	59
Switzerland	55
Japan	50
Thailand	41
Poland	39

Egypt	26
Côte d'Ivoire	14
Argentina	13
China*	11

* The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China conducts annual meetings that only last between 10-14 days.

Pre-COVID Parliamentary Functioning

- The number of sittings varies widely from as high as 254 for Brazil to as low as 11 for China.
- The average for all countries here came out to approx. 86 days
- Indian position - India ranked well below average (72 days compared to 86) to be placed 17th out of 29 countries compared here.



[Parliamentary Sitzings in Covid Year]

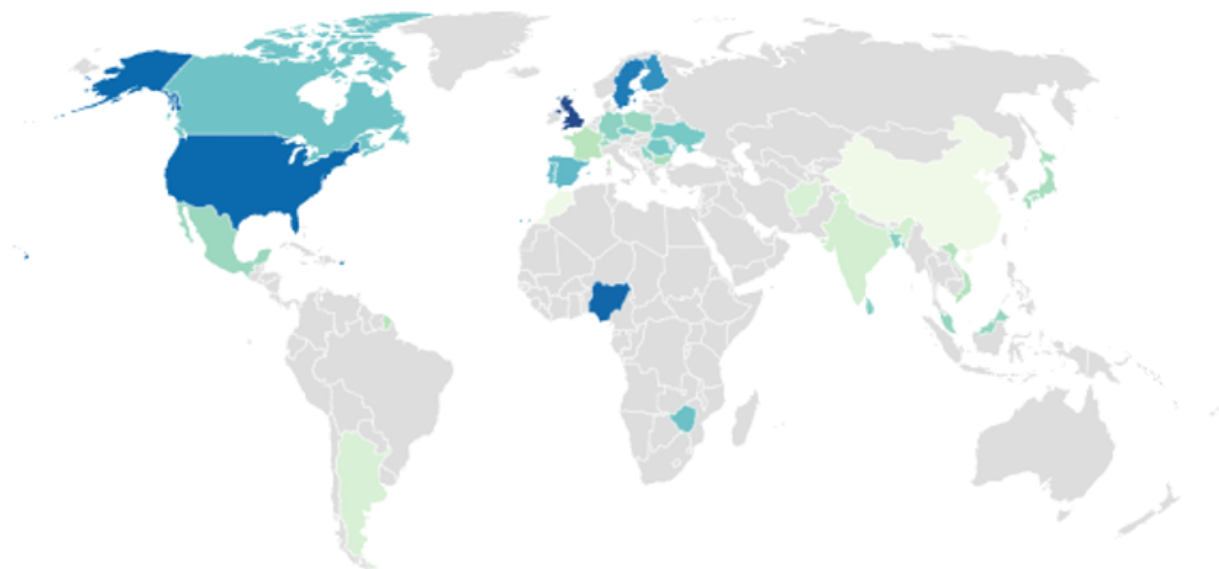


Chart showing comparative reflection of parliamentary sittings in the Covid Year
(https://www.datawrapper.de/_/9j9mF/)

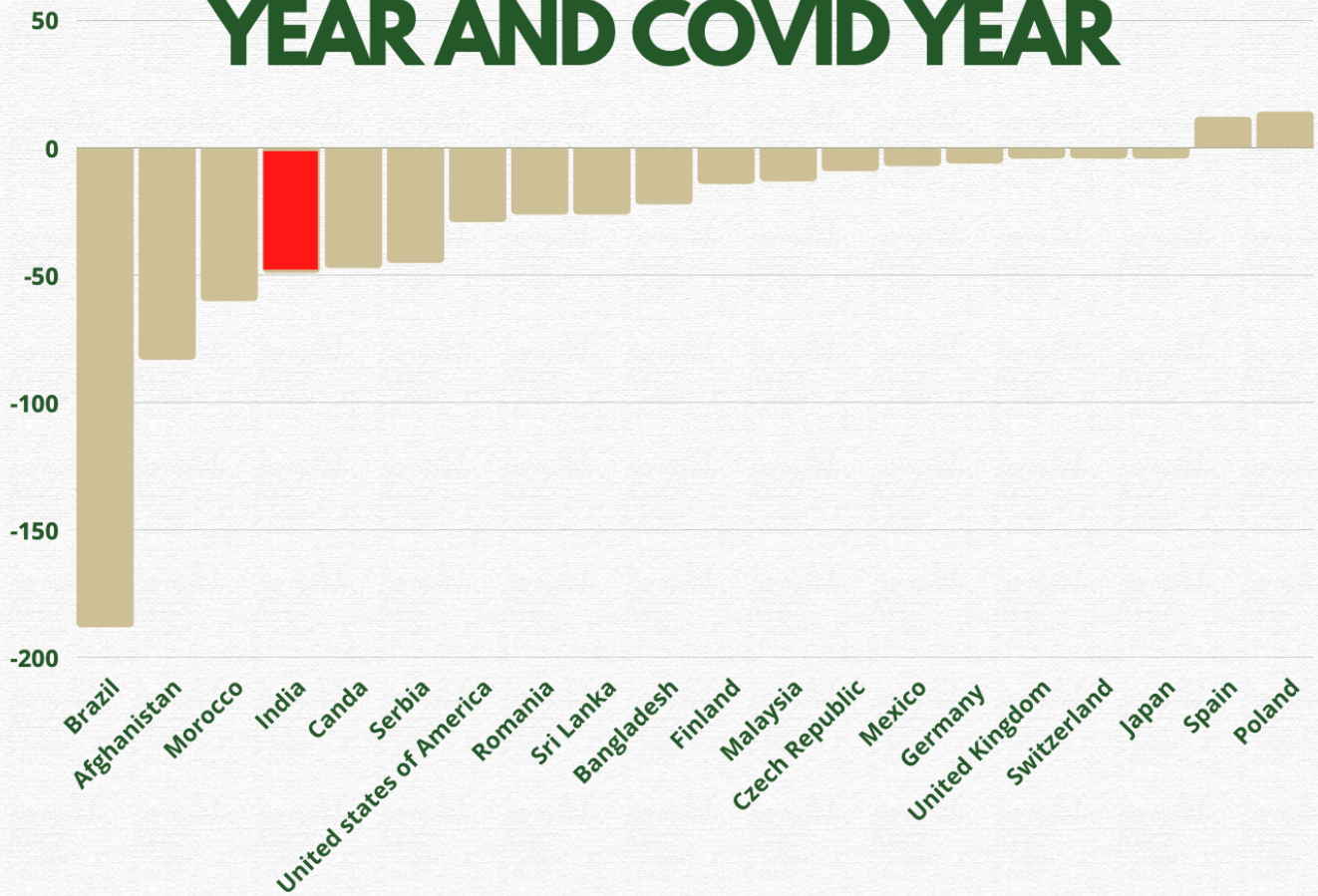
COUNTRY	NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD IN COVID YEAR
United Kingdom	196
Nigeria	168
United States of America	164
Sweden	146
Finland	125
Spain	86
Portugal	82
Zimbabwe	78
Canada	75
Czech Republic	70
Romania	70
Ukraine	69
Brazil	66
Sri Lanka	63
Bangladesh	61

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD IN COVID YEAR
Germany	60
Serbia	60
Malaysia	55
Poland	53
Mexico	52
Switzerland	51
Japan	46
Bulgaria	45
Vietnam	40
France	37
India	23
Afghanistan	20
Argentina	20
Morocco	8
China	7

Post-COVID Parliamentary Functioning

- There is a fall in the average number of sittings across most countries
- Only Poland and Switzerland had managed a higher sitting number post covid than the pre covid year
- The average number of sittings post covid - approx. 70 days - which is lower than the pre covid average of 86
- India's fall - India ranked even further below average (23 days compared to 70) - ranked 26th of 30 countries compared here.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NORMAL YEAR AND COVID YEAR



COUNTRIES	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COVID AND NON-COVID YEAR SITTING DAYS
Brazil	-188
Afghanistan	-83
Morocco	-60
India	-49
Canada	-47
Serbia	-45
United States of America	-29
Romania	-26
Sri Lanka	-26

COUNTRIES	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COVID AND NON-COVID YEAR SITTING DAYS
Bangladesh	-22
Finland	-14
Malaysia	-13
Czech Republic	-9
Mexico	-7
Germany	-6
United Kingdom	-4
Switzerland	-4
Japan	-4
Spain	12
Poland	14

The difference in pre and post COVID parliamentary productivity

- Countries like Spain, Poland, Japan, UK and Switzerland showed the least difference in sittings pre and post covid.
- Poland and Spain being the only ones showing an increase in sittings in the covid year than the previous year.
- Countries like Brazil, Morocco, Canada, India and Afghanistan showed the most significant drops in the number of sittings between pre and post-covid years.
- The average drop in sittings - 30 days
- India's position was comparatively worse here as well (49-day gap compared to 30), showing the **4th highest gap in pre and post covid years** (4th out of 20 countries compared here).

INSIGHTS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

An analysis of the report thus far shows that while a few of the countries researched have managed to retain the level of parliamentary functioning and efficiency despite the predicaments faced in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the vast majority failed to uphold pre-covid levels of functioning.

The repercussions of the reduction in the days of parliamentary functioning were manifold. With a lack of access to parliamentary decision making and debate, a vast number of parliamentary powers were usurped by the executive, blurring the lines of the division of powers. In India, this was seen in the enormous number of ordinances passed while the pandemic raged on. Moreover, in modern representative democracies such as India, apart from law-making, another essential function of the parliament is engaging in discussions of national and regional importance and voicing the problems of the people in their regions and constituencies on a national platform, in the process holding the government accountable and seeking solutions and action to ameliorate the troubles of the people. Therefore, when the functioning of the parliament stopped, there was a lack of engagement and discussion about the problems of the masses and reduced government accountability. In addition, even when the parliament functioned in India, elements such as the Question Hour were done away with, further hampering parliamentary functioning.

However, as evidenced by the findings of leading scientific researchers, the end of the COVID Pandemic is not reasonably foreseeable, and governments and institutions must evolve and adopt mechanisms that permit them to maintain efficient functioning, despite the complications arising out of the Pandemic.

While India presented itself as an example to the rest of the world in terms of the adoption of technology in democratic functioning, by using EVM's to conduct its elections as opposed to ballots in many western democracies, India has been slow to adopt technology to supplement its parliamentary functioning in the post covid world.

While the rest of the country, including courts, hospitals and educational institutions, has adopted video and audio communication technologies to function in times of covid, the parliament has thus far failed to innovate and adapt, therefore leading to a reduction in its functioning. Since technology and its adoption is essential to function in these times while maintaining social distancing and ensuring the health of the people isn't compromised, the next part of the report explores how different countries have utilised technology in terms of parliamentary functioning and how the Indian Parliament can learn and adopt some of the mechanisms in its own rules for conduct.

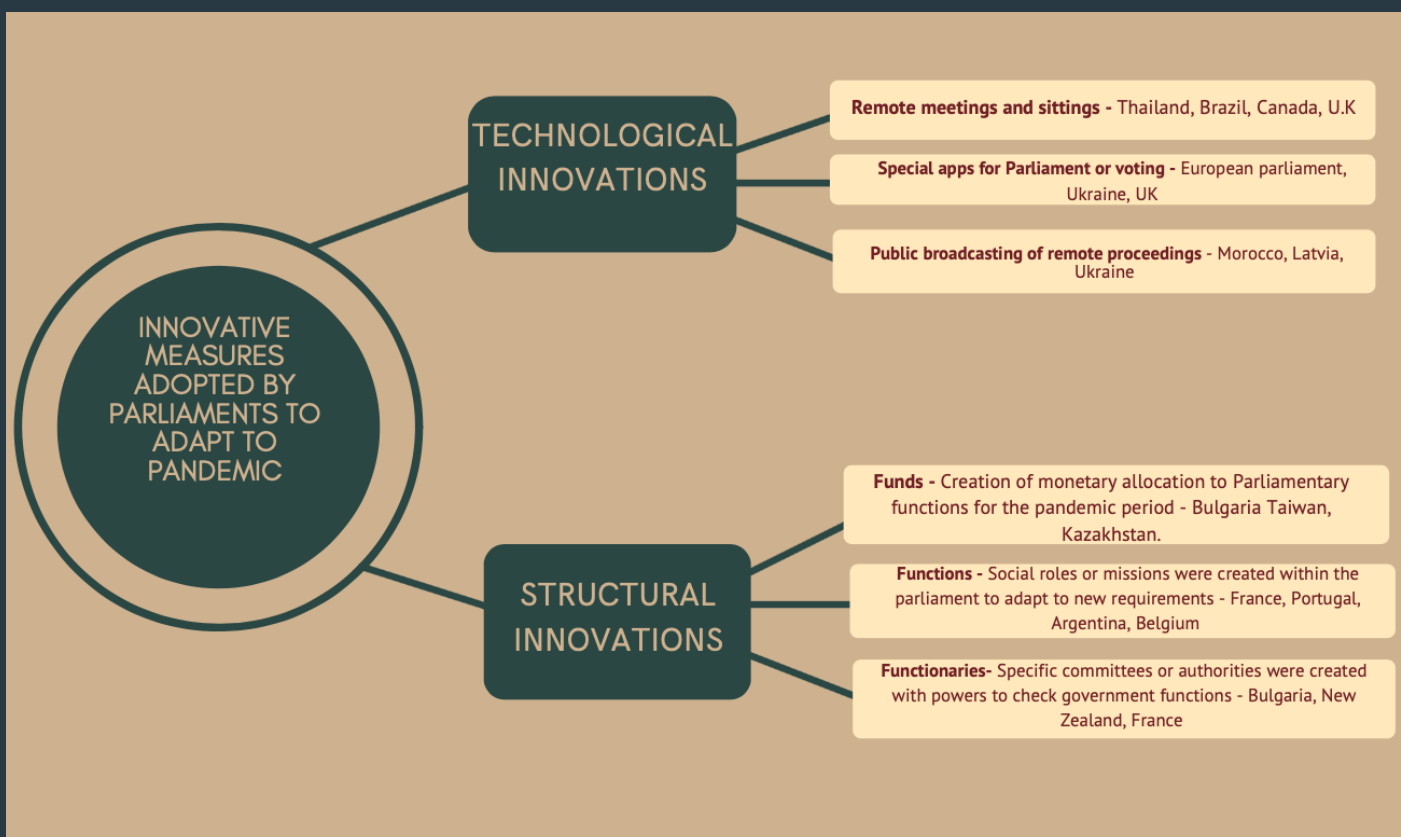
LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

The 200 parliament seat criteria were met by 63 countries, but only reliable data from 30 countries could fulfil the study's needs for Pre-COVID year and COVID year. Insufficient access to data compounded the difficulty in locating reliable data, adding to the complications of analysis in the report. Parliamentary websites were inconsistent with their sitting calendar dates and previous years' data. Even the IPU website showed that some parliaments had not given any data since 2012/13, and thus the availability of data remained a challenge for almost all nations.

For instance, Vietnam had data for the covid year, but pre-covid year's working days was a miss on the contrary. Similarly, Thailand has pre-covid data but lacked any concrete information during the covid year. The collection of data from African Nations was substantially hindered due to the problems posed by emergencies, civil wars, outdated websites. In few websites, there was a lack of linguistic access for translation, such as Nepal. We could only establish correlation and not causation as we could not conclude this indicator as a cause of better democratic functioning. Few countries did better even with less number of working days in the parliament, and some performed poorly though with a high margin of parliament functioning days. The averages were calculated for 29 countries for the Pre-Covid year and 30 countries for the Covid year.

- African nations' data was absent - so even though 63 countries had large parliaments to qualify for the study, reliable data was available only for 30 countries for pre and post covid sittings.
- Lack of authoritative sources from parliamentary websites
- Lack of linguistic access to translation
- We could only establish only correlation and not causation
- Parliamentary websites were inconsistent with their sittings calendars and previous years' data. IPU website showed that some parliaments had not given any data since 2012/13, and thus the pre covid data isn't uniform for all nations
- The difficulty of access to information compounded the difficulty in locating reliable data, adding to the complications of analysis in the report.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INNOVATIVE MECHANISMS EMPLOYED BY COUNTRIES TO AUGMENT PARLIAMENTARY PERFORMANCE



TECHNOLOGY BASED MEASURES

- **French Parliament** : The French Parliament engaged the Law Commission to create ‘digital innovations’ to fight the epidemic. Innovations including digital meetings of committees and management of questions and discussions online were proposed and carried out by the law commission.
- **Thailand Parliament:** Introduced Zoom, LINE and Webex based sessions for the duration of the first session of 2020. Citizens who came with petitions were welcomed. A specific smartphone application (MorChana - which translates to ‘Doctors Win’ in local language) was designed to ensure the safety of people entering and leaving the parliamentary building. MorChana works
- **Ukraine Parliament:** MPs used an electronic voting system, and the session was broadcast live on television and streamed online. All MPs were provided with a tablet with an installed VPN (virtual private network) for remote work. MPs had access to the electronic document management system and the electronic bill system (the systems had been developed on SharePoint Apps platform with add-ins: Provider-Hosted apps; MS SharePoint Server 2016 Enterprise); and to the electronic committee's agenda, the electronic plenary agenda, email, citizens appeals made electronically. MPs could create, sign with a digital signature, register and share their e-documents, draft laws, amendments. The system allowed MPs to register for a remote Committee session and showed all phases of the legislative process, including the creation and signing of bills, bills under discussion, amendments, MPs speeches, plenary and committee agendas.

- **Online Sittings:** Brazil, Canada, UK, Isle of Man, Welsh Assembly. Brazil quickly changed its rules to allow entirely virtual plenary sessions with more than 500 participants, Canada holds twice-weekly virtual question sessions, and the United Kingdom holds hybrid virtual and physical sessions.²
- **United Kingdom:** The development of a voting app in the United Kingdom is a fascinating innovation, with the first remote vote taking place on May 12th. Parliamentarians presently utilise MemberHub – the software on which the voting function will be implemented – to submit questions. It’s a kind of digital dashboard for MPs and their staff that helps them ask questions in parliament, and it was launched in 2017³. It leverages Microsoft logins for authentication and delivers traffic through a parliamentary-specific virtual private network (VPN). MemberHub is well-liked by MPs, and regarded as a big improvement on previous parliamentary digital services, which for years did not interact with each other, requiring questions to be tabled digitally, then printed out, and finally input into a separate system.
- **E-voting: European Parliament:** In March, the European Parliament enforced remote voting. The results of the initial polls, which saw 688 members vote out of a total of 705, indicate that the vast majority of MEPs made it through the procedure. To minimise barriers to access, the system works via e-mail, which is universally accessible in parliaments. While this does present some security concerns, these could be mitigated by publishing voting lists.

2 Rosie Beacon, “How Covid-19 Is Accelerating the Rise of Digital Democracy”.
<https://institute.global/policy/how-covid-19-accelerating-rise-digital-democracy>.

3 Chris Stockel Walker, “Inside the troubled, glitchy birth of parliament’s online voting”.
<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/virtual-parliament-voting>.

- **Croatian Parliament** - Had introduced voting by email and SMS based on representative's choice during parliamentary sittings.
- **Portugal Parliament** - Even though the constitution did not allow for remote meetings and the MPs were asked to come in reduced numbers for face-to-face sittings, a special provision was made for the Autonomous Regions of Portugal - Azores and Madeira - which are physically far away from mainland Portugal. MPs from the Autonomous regions were allowed to join in and vote remotely via Skype.
- **Polish Parliament** - Introduced electronic means of communication to enable remote working of deputies during plenary sittings, committees and subcommittees. According to the new measures, each deputy received a tablet from the parliament, together with individual login credentials and password, allowing participation in parliamentary work and e-voting.
- **Latvian Parliament** - The parliament created the 'e-Saeima' platform and website to continue plenary sessions through it. MPs may connect to the e-Saeima platform using a dedicated website on the internet and relying on a secure authentication method. the e-signature.⁴ To access a sitting, MPs need computers with an internet connection. The e-Saeima interface displays the plenary agenda and the list of MPs participating in the debate about the agenda item under consideration.

4 The Latvian Parliament ready for work using the e-Saeima platform, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/28986-the-latvian-parliament-ready-for-work-using-the-e-saeima-platform>.

TMPs may request to speak in the debate about the item under consideration or any of the upcoming items on the agenda. There are three “buttons” to cast electronic vote: “for”, “against”, and “abstain”. Upon activation of the voting mode, MPs have 30 seconds to make their decision. During this time, MPs may also change their vote. Afterwards, the results of the vote are displayed on the website. The forum has been kept open to the general public through the platform website as well as Facebook, where details of the plenary sessions and the detailed debates and vote can be accessed by the general public.

- **South Africa:** Electronic submission of questions, virtual meetings of committees.
- **Morocco:** has recently started broadcasting committees’ meetings live on the Parliament’s website and YouTube channel.

NON-TECHNOLOGY BASED MEASURES

- **French parliament** put in place a fact-finding mission that helped in gearing the response to the crisis in short, medium and long term. As early as March 2020, the Parliament had added a separate Article to its constitution, providing for the creation of a committee of scientists in the event of a state of health emergency declaration. The fact-finding mission had complete parliamentary representation and heard presentations from all major stakeholders, like the Minister of health, the Director general of public health and major scientists to make decisions on financial allocations and public health response controlled by the legislature.
- **Bulgarian Parliament** - on 14 May 2020, the National Assembly has adopted a Decision on the establishment of a Temporary Parliamentary Committee for Control of the Expenditures of Public Funds Related to Overcoming the Consequences of the Spread of COVID19. According to the initiators of this decision, this committee has “to fulfill its constitutional power to control the executive branch” in order to ensure the necessary transparency and to check the compliance of the accomplished expenditures with a range of criteria, subsequently analyzing their effectiveness.

- The commission's activities should cover “all funds collected, received, stored, distributed and spent by public sector organizations. Functioning of the TPCP - The Temporary Committee consists of 10 members. Thus, each parliamentary group in the National Assembly has appointed 2 members of the committee. The committee is entrusted with the following tasks. First, it requires and publishes information on all expenditures of public funds, including funding provided by the European Union funds or other financial instruments related to overcoming the consequences of the spread of Covid-19. Second, it checks the compliance of the individual costs with the conditions and criteria established for the individual anti-crisis measures. Third, the committee prepares a report with summary data on the costs incurred and an analysis of their effectiveness.
- **Argentina** : In Argentina, 30 civil society organizations actively collaborated the Chamber of Deputies to co-create the first

5 <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/supporting-open-parliament-initiatives-during-covid-19>

<https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/28986-the-latvian-parliament-ready-for-work-using-the-e-saeima-platform>

<https://indaily.com.au/opinion/2020/08/24/virtual-parliament-should-be-post-pandemic-reality/>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/national-cabinet-to-meet-twice-weekly-to-get-australia-s-covid-19-response-back-on-track>

https://www.inform.kz/ru/koronavirus-kakie-mery-predprinimayutsya-v-rk_a3613242

https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/ouvrages/FRS_Parliament_Portugal.pdf

https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/c/457567_0.pdf

<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/countries-regions-profile?rsc=%5B339%5D&covid19=1>

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4213706>

open parliament action plan. Through thematic sessions, civil society groups shared draft proposals with legislative staff on issues such as, digitalization of legislative documents, citizen participation, access to public information and gender equality. Following NDI's virtual course on Plain Language for Legislatures last year, the Chamber of Deputies created a Protocol for the Functioning of Remote Parliaments in Plain Language and a Guide for the Best Practices for the Participation of Legislators and Staff in Telematic meetings sessions. These initiatives and documents helped legislators and staff work remotely more efficiently during the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, the Chamber of Deputies adopted the open parliament action plan in April 2021.

- **New Zealand Parliament** - Created an 'Emergency Response Committee', chaired by the Leader of Opposition to scrutinize the government's response to the pandemic. The committee consisted of 11 members in total, six of whom will be Opposition members. The committee heard representations from a range of people from sectors including health, business, police, and civil defence. Its meetings and reports were live streamed and were available in multiple formats for wide access to the general public.
- **Australian Parliament** - From August 2020 onwards, the Australian cabinet met twice a week and met with state premiers and representatives in order to increase the frequency of interaction and have a quick response to the pandemic and the vaccine rollout later.

- **Kazakhstan Parliament** - Created an Inter-departmental committee for tackling the pandemic, chaired by the Akim (Chief Minister) of the most affected region - Berdibek Saparbayev

Kazakhstan Parliament - Created an Inter-departmental committee for tackling the pandemic, chaired by the Akim (Chief Minister) of the most affected region - Berdibek Saparbayev
- **Portugal Parliament** - Because Portugal had declared a state of health emergency, its constitution under Article 28 (1) requires the government to submit to the Parliament 3 mandatory reports every year for scrutiny by a committee led by the Leader of Opposition on the action taken to mitigate the emergency.
- **Belgian Parliament** - The two draft legislative (1 and 2) acts of 27 March 2020, which were adopted by the federal parliament granting special powers to the federal government for three months had initially included a requirement for the government to keep the Chamber of Representatives informed about the measures taken by virtue of its special powers, though this obligation was not formalized in the final act.

- **Swedish parliament** - On March 16, 2020 the group leaders of all eight party groups (i.e. parties) agreed that only 55 members should be physically present when voting in the Parliament Chamber. The decision only applied to voting procedures where normally no quorum rule exists in the Riksdag. In every other aspect all MPs remained formally in office and had to discharge their duties as normal, such as taking part in committee meeting/meetings. Before each vote, the parties decide which members should be present at the Chamber, so there is an alternation of the 55 members who participate in each voting session (usually once or twice a week). This agreement was later prolonged twice (in April and in August) to last at least until December 17, 2020.
- **Taiwanese Parliament** - The ruling party agreed to a proposal by the opposition party legislators to increase the budgetary allocation in the face of the second wave, and to increase the period of implementation of the budget to June 2022 rather than fiscal year ending March 2022. The parliament also agreed to a 10% increase in allocation to local governments as well as the formation of a panel to access and review information related to the country's acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines.

CONCLUSION

"One of the greatest lessons learned from the emergence of COVID-19 is that we must adapt our rules to ensure that institutions can function in any situation, however critical." - Laura Rojas, Speaker, Mexican Chamber of Deputies.

The Parliament, being the legislative, deliberative, and discursive fountain of democracy, is the first line of defense in an emergency. This line of defense in India, however, became inoperative and limited in its discourse, as is shown by the data and the parliamentary functioning during the pandemic year. This report tries to offer a look into the measures adopted by other democracies and Parliaments to stay in function and to take up proactive steps to engage civil society, the opposition, and the Parliamentary resources to act as a check on executive action during the pandemic.

Based on the technological and structural measures taken up by the world's Parliaments, the Indian Parliament may look to adopt measures along three major lines - Funds, Functions, and Functionaries.

FUNDS



- Creating of fund controlled by standing committee to monitor spending on pandemic relief.
- Creation of funds to empower local government

FUNCTIONS



- Add remote voting and questions to parliamentary rules of procedure, separate devices to MPs for privacy.
- Public access to online sittings.
- Mandatory reports on sittings to standing committees.

FUNCTIONARIES



- Establish an emergency response committee with leadership of opposition to check executive actions.
- Engage civil society and local government with representations to the house and committee.

Add a Parliamentary Adaptation to the Pandemic

- **Funds** - The Indian Parliament could look to create a fund that is monitored by the Public Accounts Committee that is used as the primary allocation for vaccine procurement and relief measures during the pandemic. Some Parliaments like Kazakhstan have gone for augmenting the funds to strengthen local governance. This move can also be replicated by the Indian Parliament to boost cooperative federalism and tackle the pandemic bottom-up. A critical innovation was the creation of funds to update the technological adaptability of Parliaments. The Indian Parliament can create a permanent fund for the same. This will ensure the resilience of the institution in future cases of emergencies or the need for remote functioning. However, none of these can be done without providing the legislature with the functional tools to implement changes.

- **Functions** - Parliaments around the world looked to add remote functioning and voting capabilities for their members in their Rules of Procedure. The Indian Parliament could follow the example so that sitting time isn't cut short due to the procedural void. Latvia went as far as creating an e-Parliament forum to move the questions and discussions entirely online.

Such moves not only ensure parliamentary adaptation to the emergency but also ensure open public access to Parliamentary activity during such times. Thai Parliament even welcomed citizen petitioners who had installed the MorChana app to present their cases in Parliament. Such functions could be adopted by the Indian parliament as well. One more check to executive functioning was making timely reports on executive action mandatory before the Parliament or its standing committees. This will ensure that the executive remains continuously accountable to the legislature, and any shortcomings of the executive action don't have to wait till the Parliament is in session to be checked and addressed.

Some Parliaments also made it mandatory upon themselves to meet more often and for more sessions than normal during the emergency. While the Indian parliament performed exactly the opposite of this, it could look to include measures of compulsory sittings and increased functioning during such emergencies in the future.

- **Functionaries** - This remains an area of widest possibilities during an emergency like a pandemic. The French Parliament created a Fact Finding Mission headed by the opposition to hear representations from various stakeholders and experts, check government action, and even recommend fiscal allocation to relief measures. This allowed them to quickly address local issues as and when they arose as early as the first quarter of 2020.

Another measure could be the creation of a Standing Emergency Committee like that in New Zealand to keep track of government functioning, engage with the opposition and civil society, and continue Parliament's function as a deliberative body even in absence of a continuous physical session.