

Political Data in 2021: Introducing the 2022 *Political Data Yearbook*

RAUL GOMEZ,¹ THOMAS MUSTILLO² & MICHELANGELO VERCESI³

¹University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; ²University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IA, USA; and

³Portuguese Institute of International Relations, NOVA University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Issues in national politics 2021

The year 2021 was, like its predecessor, characterized by a substantial amount of pandemic disruption. However, it also saw a gradual return to post-pandemic normality across all the countries covered by the *Political Data Yearbook*. Issues related to COVID-19 continued to significantly influence the political agenda. These included ongoing restrictions, the uneven pace of vaccination, pandemic fatigue, protests against national responses to the pandemic, and the legal and political consequences of emergency legislation.

The vaccine rollout, which in most countries had already begun in December 2020, gained pace during the first half of 2021. While this enabled governments to start lifting many of the restrictions introduced during the epidemic, the speed and extent of the vaccination drive varied significantly between countries. By April, Israel had become the country with the highest percentage of people vaccinated against COVID-19 in the entire world. Vaccine programmes quickly picked up pace also in the United Kingdom and the United States, and then in Portugal, Italy, Spain and other countries. However, successful vaccine rollouts did not completely prevent restrictions, with many countries seeing those reintroduced during the second half of the year when the Delta and Omicron variants emerged. Moreover, vaccine hesitancy, arguably fed by disinformation campaigns and low levels of trust in government, soon became visible among certain social sectors and became widespread in countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, which had the lowest vaccination rates in Europe.

In the second half of 2021, proof of vaccination (and/or a negative test) was introduced as a requirement to enter many public spaces across most European countries, Israel, New Zealand, and some parts of the United States and Canada. In some of these countries, vaccination against COVID-19 became a legal requirement for certain groups of people, such as government employees and those working in the health sector (e.g., France, Lithuania, New Zealand and the United States). In Greece, where vaccine take-up visibly slowed down after a few successful weeks, the government went even further and introduced a controversial vaccine mandate for citizens above 60 years of age that involved monthly fines for those who refused to comply.

Pandemic fatigue, derived from a year of restrictions and the adoption of new requirements, led to the multiplication of protests, often involving anti-vax groups and the far right. Although most protests were relatively fringe and minor, in Austria, Belgium, Estonia and France, among others countries, people took to the streets by the tens of thousands to express their disagreement with measures ranging from mask-wearing requirements to

bans on public gatherings and vaccine mandates. Some of the protests ended in violence, with major clashes between protestors and the police in a few cases (e.g., Austria, Australia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia and some Italian cities). Despite attempts by some political entrepreneurs to take advantage of growing discontent, these movements did not have much electoral significance.

The extraordinary measures introduced by governments to fight the spread of the pandemic were also often challenged before the courts, with several constitutional courts (e.g., Austria, Spain, Slovenia and Romania) either suspending parts of the provisions contained in pandemic-related laws, regulations and executive decrees or declaring them unconstitutional.

Last but not least, the pandemic also brought a more mundane set of political consequences, with government officials breaking their own rules and some corruption charges being brought against politicians in relation to public procurement contracts signed during the pandemic (e.g., see the *Yearbook* entries for Germany, the UK and Slovenia).

The health of democracy among the 37 country cases in the *Yearbook* has been variable. The Varieties of Democracy project's 2021 report places 16 *Yearbook* countries in the top position of their Liberal Democracy Index globally (Boese et al., 2022). In rank order, they are: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, New Zealand, Estonia, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal, the Netherlands, Australia, Luxembourg, France and Spain. Over both the short (one-year) and medium (10-year) terms, these strong democracies have registered stability.

The second decile includes most of the rest, again in rank order: the UK, Italy, Slovakia, Canada, Iceland, Austria, Lithuania, Japan, the United States, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Greece. In this set of 13 countries, however, we begin to find some volatility in performance over time. Compared with 2020, the United States and the Czech Republic have recorded a small but statistically insignificant increase in their point estimate of liberal democracy, even while they have recorded moderate and significant declines over a decade. On 6 January 2021, the day when the US legislature was certifying the results of the 2020 electoral loss of then-President Donald Trump, his supporters violently and fatally interrupted the proceedings. Congress continued and completed its task in the middle of the night after law enforcement restored order. In Greece, in addition to the decade-level decline, there were signs of erosion in 2021 that register across both the Index and the *Yearbook* country narrative published here. Greece introduced a controversial article in the criminal code against the spread of fake news, which organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders have expressed concerns about (Human Rights Watch 2021).

The third and fourth deciles of the Liberal Democracy Index include in rank order: Israel, Romania, Malta, Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria. Poland and Hungary rank in the fifth and sixth deciles, respectively. On top of significant decade-long declines, Slovenia and Poland both showed signs of additional backsliding in 2021. These generally involved attacks against critical media and academic freedom and/or reforms to undermine the independence of the judiciary. In Slovenia, these provoked major protests in April against President Janša. Hungary is the only case in the *Yearbook* set of countries to rank in the bottom half of countries globally. In 2021, there was no further erosion in the index, but the administration carried on with the practice of attacking independent civil society and the independence

of other branches of government, which accounts for the decade of collapse in their liberal democracy index. Before the beginning of the Orbán government in 2010, Hungary ranked in the top quartile of liberal democracies globally.

Compared with 2020, economic performance rebounded across all cases in the *Yearbook*, with positive growth everywhere in 2021 (The World Bank, 2022). In 2020, gross domestic product (GDP) growth per capita had been negative in all countries except Ireland, where it was 4.8 per cent. In 2021, Croatia and Ireland led with GDP per capita growth above 10 per cent. Japan, Iceland and Australia were the laggards, with growth of around 2 per cent. The largest net gains in growth over 2020 occurred in Croatia and Malta, with net gains of around 20 per cent. Despite these improvements, economic conditions were not a prominent feature of the political narratives in the country cases of our volume.

Elections and referendums in 2021

In 2021, 10 countries (Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands and Norway) included in the *Yearbook* went to the polls to renew the composition of the lower house; in other words, slightly more than one fourth (27 per cent) of the total sample. However, we record 12 general elections, since Bulgarian citizens voted thrice, in April, June and November. In contrast, no countries held upper-house elections.

The case of Bulgaria is also worth stressing because voters were called to elect the President of the Republic in November. In this context, the independent candidate and then incumbent Rumen Radev won against Anastas Gerdzhikov with 67 per cent of popular votes in the second round of 21 November. Portugal is the only other country where a presidential election took place: on 24 January 2021, the incumbent Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa won after being endorsed by the two largest parties in Parliament (Socialist Party and Social Democratic Party).

Finally, regional elections occurred in 11 countries and referendums were convened in three countries. Among them, Switzerland called referendums four times, posing 13 questions overall to its citizens.

Table 1 summarizes the information about elections and referendums in 37 countries in 2021.

In terms of outcomes, the Canadian Conservative Party lost two parliamentary seats, but it kept its plurality; yet the Liberal Party remained in power in a single-party minority Cabinet (Table 2). In the Republic of Cyprus, the Democratic Rally remained the strongest party and gained two seats, reaching the amount of nine (16 per cent); similarly, the Icelandic Independence Party maintained the same number of seats (16 after the election; 17 on 31 December 2021) and remained as the largest party, although the premiership stayed in the hands of the Left-Greens. In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party too confirmed itself as the largest party despite losing 20 seats in Parliament; in the Netherlands, the Liberal Party emerged once more as the first party by far, keeping 12 seats in the lower house. The Norwegian Labour Party confirmed its plurality and could also take over from the Conservatives in the prime ministerial office. In contrast, ANO 2011 was still the most-voted party in the Czech Republic, but it lost the prime ministership in favour of the Civic Democratic Party. The Bulgarian ‘Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria’

Table 1. Elections and referendums in 37 countries in 2021

Country	Lower house elections	Upper house elections	Presidential elections	Regional elections ^a	National referendums
Australia				1	
Austria				1	
Belgium					
Bulgaria	Yes (3)	– ^h	Yes		
Canada	Yes			4	
Croatia		–			
Cyprus	Yes	–			
Czech Republic	Yes				
Denmark		–		5	
Estonia		–			
Finland		–			
France				15 ^b	1 ^c
Germany	Yes			5	
Greece		–			
Hungary		–			
Iceland	Yes	–			
Ireland					
Israel	Yes	–			
Italy				1	
Japan	Yes				
Latvia		–			
Lithuania		–			
Luxembourg		–			
Malta		–			
Netherlands	Yes				
New Zealand		–			
Norway	Yes ^d	–			
Poland					
Portugal		–	Yes		
Romania					
Slovakia		–			
Slovenia					1
Spain				2	
Sweden		–			
Switzerland				4	13 ^e
UK				2 ^f	
United States				3 ^g	

Notes: ^aThis category includes state elections in federal countries.

^bIncluding four regions of overseas France.

^cReferendum in New Caledonia on its own independence.

^dIn addition to the general elections to the *Storting* (Norwegian Parliament), elections to the Sámi *Sametinget* were held as well.

^eThree referenda were held on 7 March, five on 13 June, two on 26 September and three on 28 November.

^fElections to the Scottish and Welsh parliaments.

^gGubernatorial elections in California, New Jersey and Virginia.

^hA hyphen (–) indicates that there is no upper chamber.

Table 2. Cabinet and gender composition of governments and parliaments in 37 countries on 31 December 2021 (or on the last day in the office for cabinets ended during 2021)

Country	Cabinet	Cabinet starting date	Parties in Cabinet (N)	Cabinet type	Cabinet members (N)	Women in Cabinet (N)	Women in Cabinet (%)	Women in lower house (N)	Women in the lower house (%)
Australia	Morrison II	29 May 2019	2	MWC	24	8	33.3↑%	47	30.9↓
Austria	Kurz II	7 January 2020	2	MWC	15	7	46.7%		
	Schallenger I	11 October 2021	2	MWC	15	7	46.7%		
	Nehammer I	6 December 2021	2	MWC	15	7	46.7↓%	75	41.0↑
Belgium	De Croo I	1 October 2020	7	OC	20	10	50.0%	60	40.0↓
Bulgaria	Borissov III	4 May 2017	2	MWC	20	7	35.0%		
	Yanev I	12 May 2021	0 ^a	NP	19	2	10.5%		
	Yanev II	16 September 2021	0 ^a	NP	19	3	15.8%		
	Petkov I	13 December 2021	4	MWC	21	5	23.8↓%	50	20.8↓
Canada	Trudeau II	20 November 2019	1	SPMI	37	18	48.6%	103	30.5↑
	Trudeau III	26 October 2021	1	SPMI	39	19	48.7↓%	48	31.8↑
Croatia	Plenković II	23 July 2020	2	MC	18	4	22.2%		
Cyprus	Anastasiades II	1 March 2018	1	SPMI	12	2	16.7↓%	8	14.3↓
Republic	Saner I	9 December 2020	3	MWC	11	1	9.1%		
TRNC	Sucuoğlu I	5 November 2021	2	MC	11	1	9.1↑%		
TRNC	Babiş II	18 June 2018	2	MC	15	4	26.7%		
Czech Republic	Fiala I	17 December 2021	5	OC	18	3	16.7↓%	51	25.5↑
Denmark	Frederiksen I	27 June 2019	1	SPMI	20	6	30.0↓%	72	41.1↑
Estonia	Ratas II	29 April 2019	3	MWC	15	2	13.3%		
	K. Kallas I	26 January 2021	2	MWC	15	6	40.0↑%	27	26.7↓
Finland	Marin I	10 December 2019	5	OC	20	10	50.0↓%	90	45.0↓
France	Castex I	7 July 2020	6	OC	41	22	53.7↑%	237	41.6↑
Germany	Merkel IV	14 March 2018	3 ^b	MWC	16	7	43.8%		
	Scholz I	8 December 2021	3	MWC	17	8	47.1↑%	257	34.9↑

Table 2. (Continued)

Country	Cabinet	Cabinet starting date	Parties in Cabinet (N)	Cabinet type	Cabinet members (N)	Women in Cabinet (N)	Women in Cabinet (%)	Women in the lower house (N)	Women in the lower house (%)
Greece	K. Mitsotakis I	9 July 2019	1	SPMA	23	2	8.7↓%	60	20.0↓
Hungary	Orbán IV	18 May 2018	2	OC	14	3	21.4%	26	13.1↑
Iceland	Jakobsdóttir I	30 November 2017	3	MWC	11	5	45.5%		
	Jakobsdóttir II	28 November 2021	3	MWC	12	5	41.7↓%	30	47.6↑
Ireland	Martin I	27 June 2020	3	MWC	15	4	26.7%	37	23.3↑
Israel	Netanyahu V	17 May 2020	8	OC	26	9	34.6%		
	Bennet I	13 June 2021	8	MWC	26	9	34.6%	36	30.0↑
Italy	Conte II	5 September 2019	4	MWC	24	7	29.2%		
	Draghi I	13 February 2021	6	OC ^d	23	7	30.4↑%	229	36.4↑
Japan	Suga I	16 September 2020	2	OC	21	2	9.5%		
	Kishida I	4 October 2021	2	OC	20	3	15.0%		
	Kishida II	10 November 2021	2	OC	21	3	14.3↑%	45	9.7↓
Latvia	Kariņš I	23 January 2019	4	MC	14	2	14.3↓%	27	27.0↓
Lithuania	Šimonytė I	11 December 2020	3	MWC	15	7	46.7%	40	28.4↑
Luxembourg	Bettel II	5 December 2018	3	MWC	17	5	29.4%	21	35.0↑
Malta	Abela II	23 November 2020	1	SPMA	21	1	4.8↓%	9	13.4
Netherlands	Rutte III	26 October 2017	4	MWC	15	4	26.7↓%	61	40.7↑
New Zealand	Ardern II	6 November 2020	1	SPMA	20	8	40.0%	59	49.2↑
Norway	Solberg IV	24 January 2020	3	MC	20	9	45.0%		
	Støre I	14 October 2021	2	MC	19	10	52.6↑%	78	46.2↑
Poland	Morawiecki II	15 November 2019	1	SPMA	23	2	8.7↑%	129	28.0↓
Portugal	Costa II	26 October 2019	1	SPMI	17	8	47.1↑%	93	40.4↓
Romania	Çiuc I	23 December 2020	2	MC	21	1	4.8%		
	Çiucă II	25 November 2021	3	OC	22	1	4.5↓%	62	18.8↑
Slovakia	Matovič I	21 March 2020	4	OC	15	3	20.0%		
	Heger I	1 April 2021	4	OC	15	3	20.0%	33	22.0
Slovenia	Janša III	13 March 2020	3	MC	18	2	11.1↓%	26	28.9↑

Table 2. (Continued)

Country	Cabinet	Cabinet starting date	Parties in Cabinet (N)	Cabinet type	Cabinet members (N)	Women in Cabinet (N)	Women in Cabinet (%)	Women in lower house (N)	Women in the lower house (%)
Spain	Sánchez II	13 January 2020	2	MC	23	15	65.2↑%	101	28.9↓
Sweden	Löfven II	21 January 2019	2	MC	22	11	50.0%		
	Löfven III	9 July 2021	2	MC	22	11	50.0%		
Switzerland	Andersson I	30 November 2021	1	SPMI	23	12	52.2↑%	164	47.0↓
	Parmelin I	1 January 2021	4	OC	7	3	42.9%	85	42.5↑
United Kingdom	Johnson II	12 December 2019	1	SPMA	21	5	24.0↑%	208	32.0↓
United States	Trump I	20 January 2017	1	SPMI ^d	25	3	12.0%		
	Biden I	20 January 2021	1	SPMA ^d	25	12	48.0↑%	120	27.6↑

Notes: SPMA, single-party majority Cabinet; SPMI, single-party minority Cabinet; MNC, minimum winning coalition; OC, oversized coalition; MC, minority coalition; NP, non-partisan. Arrows indicate lower (down) or higher (up) percentages of women in government and Parliament compared with 31 December 2020.

^aThe Cabinet included one partisan minister from BSP for Bulgaria.

^bTwo coalition partners, CDU and CSU, formed a single parliamentary group in the lower house of Parliament.

^cThe Cabinet comprised several non-partisan ministers, including a technocratic prime minister. It had a strong technocratic profile, although parties were in government.

^dFormally, the cabinets are SPMI and SPMA, respectively. However, United States is a peculiar case, for which the used classificatory criteria fit poorly (cf. Katz 2022 in this issue for the non-applicability of classic criteria).

party lost its plurality at the July election and became the second largest party in November, after 'We Continue the Change' (which also gained the prime ministership). Finally, the German Christian Democratic Union lost both its plurality and the chancellorship, which moved to the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz.

Overall, these data suggest that, among the strongest parties, in 2021 electoral stability prevailed over volatility.

Changes in the composition of cabinets and parliaments

Table 2 provides systematic information about Cabinet and Parliament compositions in the countries included in the *Yearbook*, with a focus on the representation of women.

In 2021, 21 new cabinets entered office (14 in 2020) in 16 countries: three in Bulgaria; two in Austria, Japan and Sweden; one in Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the United States. In these countries, only three incumbent prime ministers (Trudeau in Canada, Jakobsdóttir in Iceland and Löfven in Sweden) were confirmed after 1 January 2021; moreover, Swedish Prime Minister Löfven was eventually replaced by Andersson in November. From 1 January to 31 December 2021, full government alternation occurred in Bulgaria, Norway and the United States. Germany, Israel, Italy and Romania, in turn, experienced only partial alternation among parties in the Cabinet, while no alternation can be observed in Austria, Canada, the TRNC, Iceland, Japan, Slovakia and Sweden. Yet, government coalitions in the TRNC and Sweden lost one member during the year: the Rebirth Party and the Greens, respectively.

With regard to women's participation in cabinets, the numbers are similar to those of 2020 (Clark et al., 2021) when, on average, 31 per cent of ministers were female. About the same percentage defines the average representation of women in the lower house on 31 December 2021. However, there was significant cross-country variation.

Relative to 2020, the percentage of female ministers in Cabinet increased in 14 countries (38 per cent) as of 31 December 2021, while it decreased in 13 countries (35 per cent). Cabinets in 12 countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United States) performed well in terms of gender parity. Notably, France, Norway, Spain and Sweden had a majority of women in Cabinet, with Spain at the highest percentage (65 per cent). In contrast, women were less than 10 per cent in the cabinets of the TRNC, Greece, Poland and Romania (Romanian female ministers were less than 5 per cent).

Similar variation arises in women's representation in lower houses. In the parliaments of Iceland, New Zealand and Sweden, the percentage of female MPs reached almost 50 per cent (48 per cent, 49 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively). Women were more than 40 per cent also in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland (and exactly 40 per cent in Portugal). Japan displays, in contrast, the lowest percentage among all countries in the *Yearbook* (slightly below 10 per cent), followed by Hungary and Malta (13 per cent), the Republic of Cyprus (14 per cent), and Romania (19 per cent).

In sum, equality in the descriptive representation of women and men in cabinets and parliaments was, in most cases, still far from being reached. In this regard, there is little change compared with 2020.

Format of the *Political Data Yearbook*

The *Yearbook* includes 37 countries and covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2021. As in earlier editions, the country reports broadly follow the following framework:

- Introduction.
- Election report.
 - Parliamentary elections.
 - Presidential elections.
 - Regional elections.
 - National initiatives and referendums.
- Cabinet report.
- Parliament report.
- Political party report.
- Institutional change report.
- Issues in national politics.

The election reports discuss the relevant lower house, presidential, regional and/or referenda elections that have taken place that year. Each country report consists of a Cabinet report and a lower house report. If a country has seen multiple cabinets in office or multiple lower chambers, for instance after a general election, multiple Cabinet/lower house reports are included. Significant changes to political parties are discussed in the political party report. Changes to the institutional design of a country's political system are addressed in the institutional change report. If a heading is not included, the theme in question was not relevant to the annual country report.

Sources

- Boese, V.A., Alizada, N., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Natsika, N., Sato, Y., Tai, H., and Lindberg, S.I. (2022). *Autocratization Changing Nature? Democracy Report 2022*. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem).
- Clark, A., Meijers, M., and Mustillo, T. (2021). 'Political data and developments in 2020: Politics during a global pandemic.' *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook* 60: 3–12.
- Human Rights Watch (2021). 'Greece: alleged 'Fake News' Made a Crime. New Law Could Lead to Journalists Being Jailed'. [Accessed on 24 October 2022] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/17/greece-alleged-fake-news-made-crime>
- The World Bank. (2022). World Development Indicators. Washington, D.C., Available online at: <https://data.worldbank.org/>