

The risks of COVID-19 crisis on democracy and government effectiveness: Evidence from the United Kingdom

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Abstract:

COVID-19 pandemic has imposed difficulties on governance and democracy across the world, which led some developed countries to suffer from this crisis. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the risks of Coronavirus on democracy and government effectiveness in the United Kingdom. Our study explored democracy score, quality of the healthcare system and the UK ranking in the world before Coronavirus and then the impact of the outbreak on democracy and government effectiveness was highlighted. Based on a statistical and analytical approach, the study revealed the following: the healthcare system in Britain was sick before Coronavirus, the transition period from the campaign to elections to form a new government affected negatively government effectiveness and economic growth rates, COVID-19 led to decisions instability and a sharp economic recession despite the high democratic level; furthermore, COVID-19 found to restrict freedom and civil liberties democracies claim.

Key words: COVID-19 – Democracy – Government effectiveness – Economic growth – Healthcare system – United Kingdom.

المخلص:

جائحة كوفيد 19 فرضت العديد من الصعوبات على الحوكمة والديموقراطية في العالم، والتي دفعت بعض الدول المتقدمة إلى المعاناة من أثر هذه الأزمة. ولذلك تهدف هذه الورقة العلمية إلى تحليل مخاطر فيروس كورونا على الديموقراطية وجودة الحكومة في المملكة المتحدة. من خلال دراستنا قمنا بتحليل معدل الديموقراطية، جودة النظام الصحي وترتيب المملكة المتحدة في العالم قبل الجائحة

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ومن ثم عرض أثر الأزمة الصحية على الديمقراطية وجود الحكومة. بالاعتماد على منهجية احصائية وتحليلية توصلنا إلى النتائج التالية: النظام الصحي في بريطانيا كان مريضاً قبل فيروس كورونا، الفترة الممتدة بين الحملة الانتخابية والانتخابات أثرت سلباً على جودة الحكومة ونسبة النمو الاقتصادي، كوفيد 19 أدى إلى عدم استقرار قرارات الحكومة وإلى ركود اقتصادي حاد بالرغم من المؤشرات العالية للديموقراطية وكذلك وجد أن كوفيد 19 قيد سير الحرية التي تزعمها الديمقراطية. الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد19؛ الديمقراطية؛ جودة الحكومة؛ النمو الاقتصادي؛ النظام الصحي؛ المملكة المتحدة.

Introduction:

Better life standards, stability, freedom and growth are the priority of leaders and governors in a country; this research area was a subject of many studies conducted by economists, politicians and sociologists. Regime type and degree of growth in nations are one of the compelling subjects in the last decades. A corpus of studies dedicated to delve deep into the impact of democracy on economic growth, which found that democratisation process is a cause for economic growth (Acemoglu, Johnson, & James.A, 2005). Democracy and good governance were always a combination of development; however, the question needs to be asked is the performance of this combination in a time of crisis.

COVID-19 pandemic a severe crisis started from Wuhan in China in December 2019 and spread all over the world, and brought about hard days of depression, instability, social distancing and economic recession; It is a public health emergency that has changed the pace of science and brings new rules to our life. This virus makes no distinction between people's race, development in countries or even differences between nations. United Kingdom one of the best countries in the world was also hit hard by COVID-19, this great country experienced previous crises in 1979 and 2008 and it showed strength and vigilance; however, Coronavirus pandemic coincided with leaving Europe Union on 31 January 2020, which means

a new government and new international relations. Therefore, our paper aims to answer the following question: **What are the risks of COVID-19 on democracy and government effectiveness in the United Kingdom?**

To perform this study, we followed a statistical and analytical approach, where we focused more on websites information because of the lack of literature in this regard. United Kingdom was the case of the study for two reasons: the high levels of development and the bad performance in dealing with COVID-19. This paper contributes to the existing literature through two aspects: the ambiguous impact of the crisis on the government effectiveness and how democracy performs in a time of crisis. The paper is organised as follows: firstly, a section for the methodology and data; Secondly, a section to discuss the UK before COVID-19; thirdly, a section for the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, and a fourth section to discuss the impact of the pandemic on democracy and government effectiveness. Finally, a fifth section for the conclusion.

1- Methodology:

The study covers data for a three indexes of democracy (2006-2019), Healthcare system quality (2019), Best country ranking index (2019) and Gross Domestic Product (2019-2020) in the United Kingdom. At first, we focused on analysing data displayed in graphs and tables for democracy, healthcare systems and best country ranking to reveal the real situation of the United Kingdom before COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Secondly, we examined the impact of COVID-19 on democracy and government effectiveness through the analysis of reactions and government's decisions. The data were collected from different resources : Freedom House Index, Systematic Peace(Polity Index) and Economic Intelligence Unit for democracy; World Health Organisation for the health system qualification data; Gross domestic

product from the Office National of Statistics(UK) and the best country data were collected from BAV Group and University of Pennsylvania.

Table01 Data description

Definition	Source
Polity Index	
Ranges from 0 to 10 with 0 most autocratic and 10 most democratic, its formula of calculation is: polity = democracy-autocracy.	www.systemicpeace.org
Freedom House Index	
Ranges from 1 (most democratic) to 7(most autocratic) calculated by civil liberties and political participation	www.freedomhouse.org
Economic Intelligence Index	
Divide countries into four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. It ranges from 0(low democracies) to 10 (high democracies)	www.eiu.com
Health System Quality	
Euro Health Consumer Index composed of 46 indicators aggregated into six sub-disciplines (patient rights and information, accessibility, outcomes, range of services, prevention, pharmaceuticals) to assess the performance of national healthcare. It started in 2005 and its last version is in 2018.	(Björnberg & Yung Phang, 2019)
Best Country's Ranking	
A set of 65 indicators developed by BAV Group and Wharton School that aggregated into nine indexes: Adventure (2%), Citizenship(15.88%), Cultural Influence(12956%), Entrepreneurship(17.87%), Heritage(1.13, Movers(14.36%), Open for Business(11.08%), Power(7.95%).	www.usnews.com
Gross Domestic Product	
The masseuse of the final production of goods and services in a period of time, it is used as a metric for economic growth in a country.	www.ons.gov.uk

Reference: Authors' construction

2- United Kingdom before COVID-19:

2-1- Democracy in the UK:

Democracy is measured by the three best-known indexes in research during the period from 2006 to 2019 (Table 02). Polity index gave the highest degree of 10 over the period 2006-2015 and then a score of 8 started from 2016 until the last updated version in 2018, which expresses a high level of democracy; however, the decline of democracy in 2016 came after the first debate of Brexit that affected this

index. For the Freedom House Index, Britain showed an outstanding performing in the term of political rights and civil liberties in this last decade, which explains why the United Kingdom is a destination of many immigrants and refugees. The Economic Intelligence Unit index scored 8 for the United Kingdom between 2006 and 2016 and a 9 since 2017, because the index evaluates the political performance, freedom and equality that knew high levels in the last years. The best-known indexes of democracy in research revealed that Britain is a full democratic country, and according to the democratisation theory, democracy is a factor of success in the UK.

Table02 Democracy in the United Kingdom from 2006 to 2019

Year	Polity Index	Freedom House Index		Economic Intelligence Unit
		Political rights	Civil liberties	
2006	10	1	1	8
2007	10	1	1	8
2008	10	1	1	8
2009	10	1	1	8
2010	10	1	1	8
2011	10	1	1	8
2012	10	1	1	8
2013	10	1	1	8
2014	10	1	1	8
2015	10	1	1	8
2016	8	1	1	8
2017	8	1	1	9
2018	8	1	1	9
2019		1	1	9

Reference: Authors' construction

2-2- The UK ranking in the world:

BAV Group and University of Pennsylvania have developed a ranking score for the best 80 countries in the world through the aggregation of 65 indicators into six basic indexes. The United Kingdom was ranked as the fifth-best country in the world in 2019, which beside the high score of democracy a highly developed country.

Table 03 shows that Britain was among the first in terms of cultural influence, entrepreneurship and power because it has a strong military as well as strong international alliances, educated people and skilled labour force. But for adventure and movers, the United Kingdom was ranked the 36th and the 49th, respectively.

Table03 United Kingdom Ranking in the world, 2019

Category	Score	Ranking out of 80 countries
Adventure	26.2	36
Citizenship	81.2	11
Cultural Influence	71.3	5
Entrepreneurship	88.5	4
Heritage	65.5	12
Movers	19.8	49
Open for Business	54.6	27
Power	82.6	5
Quality of life	69.7	12
Overall Rank		5

Reference: www.usnews.com

2-3- Healthcare system in the United Kingdom:

Euro Health Consumer Index (EHCI) measures the quality of healthcare systems in a country based on six sub-disciplines. In the last version of this index in 2018, the United Kingdom ranked in the 16th place as country that needs fundamental change in its healthcare system according to 34% of a sample of the UK public (Björnberg & Yung Phang, 2019). It seems that NHS faced some challenges after the first vote for Brexit that caused shortage of stuff in hospitals because many Europeans started to pack their bags to return to their countries regardless all efforts made not done by the British government; moreover, data showed a sharp decrease in talent migration of 246000 in one year following the Brexit vote (Yeginsu, 2018). This sensible matter occurred when Britain was preparing for winter, a period of flu and respiratory problems that led to a pressure in hospitals due to the limited beds and staff. Patients accused hospitals to risk their life because they were forced to wait for a long time to be treated and sometimes redirected to

pharmacies and considered as not urgent cases. Problems as resignations and protests started to face the government after being blamed as insufficient in funding the healthcare service. At this time of pressure Boris Johnson showed good intention in social Media and wrote that he will build a new system with better equipment and primary care, and his party promised to improve the health system by pumping an additional 26 billion pounds, by 2024 (Mueller, 2019)

Table04 Health System in the United Kingdom

Category	Score	Maximum score
Patient rights and information	117	125
Accessibility	100	225
Outcomes	211	300
Prevention	113	125
Pharmaceutical	78	100
Total Score	728	
Rank	16	

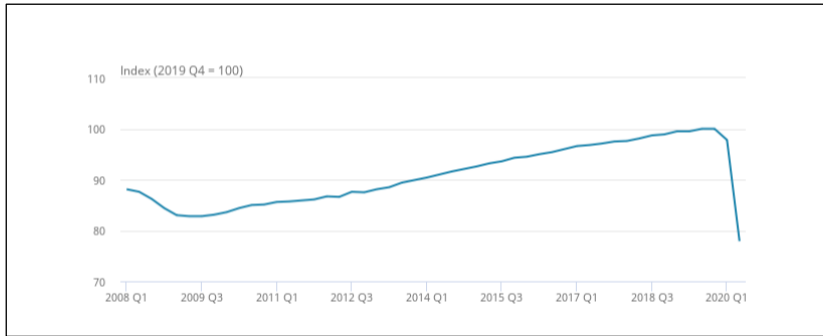
Reference: (Björnberg & Yung Phang, 2019, p. 28)

3- The impact of COVID-19 on the economy of the UK:

British economy is one of the largest economies in the world (6th largest economy in 2019) with a gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.21 trillion British pounds, price consumer index of 1.5% and unemployment rate of 3.8%. Britain experienced one of the hardest moments in the history of its economy in 1979 crisis, where the UK faced a very severe decrease in economic growth; knew high rates of inflation, unemployment and protests. However, since the days of Margaret Thatcher, the economy has seen the light, until Britain becomes one of the greatest leaders in the world and the fifth-best country in 2019. The end of this year was the start of decline in the British economy, according to (BBC News, 2020), economy grew by only 0.3% in the final quarter of 2019 with a decline of 1.1% in manufacturing sector because some factories stopped working in November due to Britain's leaving the European Union without a deal on October 31. Mars 2020 the start of quarantine in the UK due to COVID-19, the British economy knew harsh

plummeting implications. Recent ONS monthly figures (Office for National Statistics, 2020) showed the economy fall by 20.4% on April - the largest drop since the crisis in 1979, and three times greater than the decline of 2008.

Figure 01 Real GDP fell by 20.4% in Q2 2020.



Reference of figures: Office for National statistics (UK)

This fall has touched all other sectors especially production, construction and index of services because of the lockdown. A decline of growth in: construction, index of production, and index of services by -35%, -4.8%, -19.9%; respectively, as shown in Table 05.

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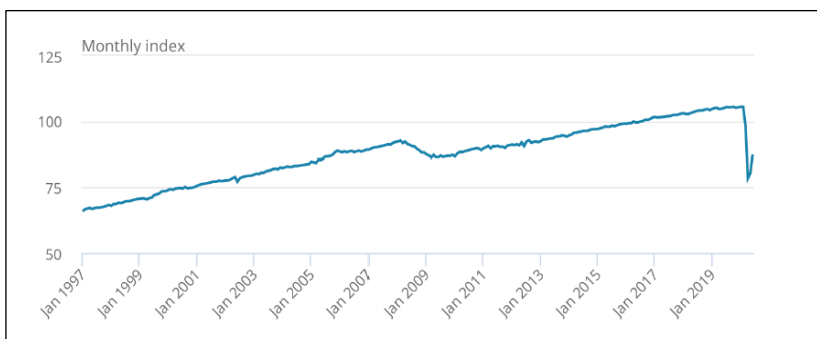
Table05 GDP and its subsectors, April to June 2020

	Growth (%)	Contribution to growth (%)
Agriculture	-4.8	-0.03
Index of Production	-16.9	-2.24
Manufacturing	-20.2	-1.93
Construction	-35	-2.15
Index of Service	-19.9	-15.9
Transport and storage	-30	-1.23
Accommodation and food service	-86.7	-2.24
Information and communication	-11.8	-0.86
Professional, scientific and technical activities	-20.4	-1.67
Administrative and support activities	-30.2	-1.64
Education	-34.4	-1.94
Human health and social activities	-27.2	-2.04
All Other services	-45.4	-1.58
Whole economy	-20.4	-20.4

Reference: Office for National statistics (UK)

On June 2020, the economy grew by 8.7% and it started to increase gradually after the ease of restrictions on movement by opening schools, people started to return to their activities, launching factories and some travel activities.

Figure 02 GDP grew by 8.7% in June 2020, but is still well below the levels seen in February 2020



Reference of figure: Office for National statistics (UK)

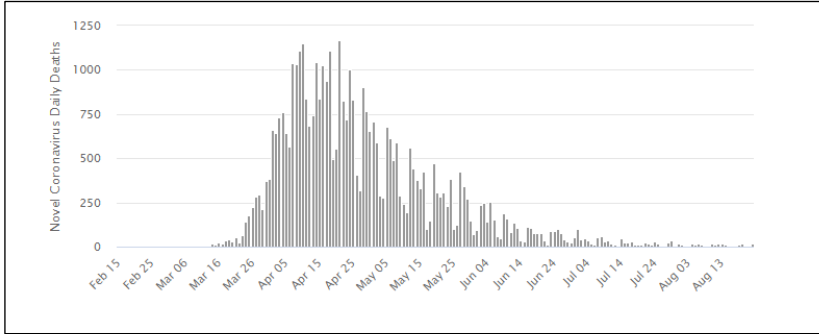
4- The risk of COVID-19 on government effectiveness:

4-1- Late lockdown, late support of the economy and early lifting:

The first reported case of Coronavirus in the United Kingdom on January 31 was not enough to convince the new government -that was still celebrating Brexit- to take the pandemic seriously and react early regardless the destruction caused by Coronavirus in China and the instructions of the World Health Organisation. On April 13, 2020, Dr. Jenny Harries argued the need of tracing the virus by saying that the WHO is addressing all countries the same instructions regardless the different health infrastructures (Yamey & Wenham , 2020). The death toll knew high rates followed the herd-immunity strategy in a time of pressure, when a scandal was spread when sending health workers into hospitals and care facilities without suitable PPE or access to testing and nurses were forced sometimes to use trash bags instead of proper masks. The result was to blame Boris Johnson and his party by the opposition of being late and incompetent in dealing with COVID-19, after witnessing a very difficult moment since 41 years. Meanwhile, Government's response to support the economy was late; they waited till mid-March to launch the support scheme plan (BBC News, 2020). It seemed that Boris Johnson is a man of his word, his focus was all directed to protect the National Health System solely where he emphasised on this saying "Protect the NHS" with no plan for the economy. By mid-March the government decided to put an unprecedented economic support for business worth £160bn and £30bn as a next stage with an amount of £100m for children to learn at home and £28bn as a support for councils, businesses and communities locally. Boris Johnson promised an "infrastructure revolution" as the deepest reforms since the Second World War by speeding up building infrastructure through pumping £5bn of spending on infrastructure projects (Verity, 2020). The situation continued to worsen when Britain took another gamble by easing its

lockdown at an early stage, when it has the worst overall COVID-19 death toll in Europe, with more than 46000 dead according to statistics.

Figure 03 Coronavirus daily deaths in Britain



Reference of figure: www.worldmeters.com

4-2- COVID-19 and Education:

Boris Johnson and his government have faced another risk and this time was a very sensible, it is about education and exam results, which are the concern of every pupil and family in the country. Besides the depression and difficult circumstances that were imposed on families started with social distancing, a new matter has occurred as a nightmare. It started the day of revealing the results of A-level and GCSE exams that was like a thunder announcement for pupils and their parents. Pupils were on fire to know their results, it is something related to their future, and then most of them got the opposite of what they have predicted. The results were low graded and sometimes worse; as a prediction of a become u they took it as unfairness. It was seen as a help for “smaller private schools and harm for brighter students in a poorly performing state school” (Adams & Stewart, 2020).

Many MPs criticised this huge mess produced by Ofqual that based on previous performance, and they said that it is the least they want in this time of crisis. Many pupils and families were about to protest and it would lead to political instability because of COVID-19 unless the government has intervened. All these comments and

reactions spread some anxiety and instability inside the government and they went to tell schools and colleges to not issue BTEC results a few hours of the official announcement, which exacerbated the situation and caused more frustration and disappointment. Because of this, Gavin Williamson offered to resign as education secretary in the immediate aftermath of the A-level grading fiasco only for it to be refused by the Prime Minister. Therefore, government apologised to pupils and eliminated the disaster result replacing it with teacher assessments, which was seen as a sign of grade inflation.

4-3- Failure of track system:

(Cellan-Jones, 2020)The end of March, UK government planned a tracing app to save lives based on four aims: Stop or slow the epidemic, Control the flow of patients into hospitals, Help people return to normal life, Gather secondary data for use by the NHS and strategic leaders. The project realisation started on April 12, where the government announce officially the app, and everything was going well until the test of the application in the Isle of Wight on the 5th may, a period when Johnson said that track and trace will be ‘world-beating’ and it will be launched by Jun the first. After that the progress was cloudy and people started to miss the update. Things went worse after missing the date and delay started to rise; on June 5 Minister said: ‘I can’t give you a date’ and on June 17 he said the app is not a priority. It was a failure of 96% showed by reports after the app launched for the test.

4-4- COVID-19 and instability of decisions:

Britain showed an instability in decisions making that led people to be angry with their governors and blame them for the hard days they have experienced. The first late decision was on the early stage of Coronavirus on April when scientists urged government to wear masks; however, they said there in no general proof that

wearing will hinder COVID-19 spread in our society, and by July wearing masks was mandatory, which cause moments of distrust. The same happened for COVID19 definition; a time when countries said that loss of smell and taste is a symptom, UK government said it is not a part of definition (3rd April), and they waited until Monday 18th of May to add it. Another thing happened for the travellers after the lockdown was lifted; the relief and the joy of vacations were replaced by more depression due to quarantine rules. They found themselves in a complicated situation. The 14 days of quarantine caused some problems at work and loss of salary, which pushed them return and spend their holidays in quarantine.

5- Democracy and COVID-19:

5-1- demonstrations and elections:

Peaceful demonstration is a democratic action by citizens to express their ideas and the degree of satisfaction in the current government. The United Kingdom knew some sort of protests due to the George Floyd's death and after the horrific video that was spread in the world. Reports revealed other reasons for demonstrations in the UK that was produced by the pressure of COVID-19 pandemic and the decisions of the government that affected minorities in the country. Black people and community minority hit harder by COVID19 crisis financially where they used to work in most shut down sectors, and die more than white people. Democracy restriction was seen in the police present at protests who chose to arrest some protesters for lockdown offences, and not break the demonstrations. Another facet of democracy is local elections that were supposed to take place on 7 May 2020; however it was procrastinated to the 6th of May 2021, which was the advice of the electoral commission in agreement with Labour and the Liberal democrats. (BBC News, 2020)

5-2- Racism and restriction of civil liberties:

The announcement of more lockdown before EID AL ADHA one of the holiest festivals of Muslims was heavy for them, especially when rumours were spread that “Muslims used to gather secretly during Ramadan and the mosques were secretly open” (Zamira, 2020). The lockdown was in places with high populations of Muslims, which led Muslims leaders to express their critics towards the timing of this decision; however, government said that the decisions are based on scientific truths with aim to keeping people safe. To fix things, the prime minister has delivered an apologise to all Muslims, where he expressed his gratitude towards the massive work of mosques and imams and he appreciated efforts and sacrifices done by Muslims.

Conclusion:

The Coronavirus pandemic is a crisis that affected the economy and policy in the world. It was very hard for the new elected governments to perform an effective response to COVID-19 regardless the degree of development. The paper was conducted to explore the behaviour of democracy and government effectiveness during the pandemic in the United Kingdom the fifth-best country in the world in 2019.

The study based on a statistical and analytical approach and it revealed the following:

- Britain was sick before it caught Coronavirus;
- The transition period from the campaign to elections to form a new government affected negatively government effectiveness and economic growth rates;
- COVID-19 led to decisions instability and a sharp economic recession;
- COVID-19 restricted democratic process and freedom.

These results guide us to highlight the importance of the early risk assessment in countries.

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