The effect of trust in government on elections during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Korea

Seungwon Yu¹ | Eun Ji Yoo² | Suhee Kim³

¹Department of Public Administration, Korea National Police University, Asan, South Korea
²BK 21 FOUR Education & Research Programs, Sung Kyun Kwan University, Seoul, South Korea
³Korea Ministry of the Interior and Safety, Sejong, South Korea

Abstract
Recent studies focused on the pandemic's effect on elections, examining partial government interventions (e.g., lockdowns) or a specific area within a country. Governments have taken a variety of nationwide measures in reaction to the pandemic, and they may or may not be working in the best interests of citizens. If citizens believe that a government demonstrates competence, benevolence and honesty in making pandemic-related decisions, trust in that government may grow, affecting election results. Using data for trust in government and nationwide elections during the pandemic in South Korea, we find that trust in government completely mediates the relationship between the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the results of elections (i.e., ruling party's win and vote share).

Keywords
election, South Korea, mediator, COVID-19 pandemic, trust in government

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we ask, what role does trust in government play in elections held during the pandemic? Health scientists have long warned that emerging infectious diseases represent a new reality with the potential to cause untold human suffering and economic disaster (Hudecheck et al., 2020); such diseases have a major influence on the process and outcomes of elections. COVID-19 may have a direct or indirect impact on elections. Voters have emotional reactions to crises such as COVID-19, and their emotions may affect their choices in elections (Achen & Larry, 2017; Healy et al., 2010; Wolfers, 2002). Such crises also affect government
responses, which indirectly affect voters’ choices (Ashworth et al., 2018). Studies have shown that trust in government affects the results of elections (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Hetherington, 1998). Trust in government is defined as citizens’ positive perceptions of the competence, benevolence, and honesty of the government (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013). If a government responds sincerely, effectively, and transparently to a crisis such as COVID-19, making decisions that protect the lives of its citizens and aid in recovering economic vitality, trust in government may increase.

To date, many scholars have analyzed the relationship between crises and elections (Achen & Larry, 2017; Ashworth et al., 2018; Futák-Campbell, 2021; Healy et al., 2010; Mueller, 1970; Wolfers, 2002) and that between trust in government and elections (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Citrin & Donald, 1986; Hetherington, 1998). We link these analyses, noting that the COVID-19 crisis may have an indirect impact on elections through the mediating role of trust in government as influenced by government responses.

We review recent published or working papers focused on the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on either trust in government/political trust or elections. Most of these recent studies found a “rally-around-the-flag” effect or an accountability effect. However, they focused only on particular areas of a country (e.g., Esaiasson et al., 2021; Leininger & Schaub, 2020) and only on some (e.g., Bol et al., 2021; Devine et al., 2020) of the various measures that governments may take in response to COVID-19. In fact, these studies presented different results on the same country due to differences in methodology and focus (e.g., Adam-Troian et al., 2020 vs. Giommoni & Gabriel, 2020 on France; Bove & Riccardo, 2020 vs. De Vries et al., 2020 on Germany). In particular, none of these studies took into account trust in government as a reflection of citizens’ evaluation of comprehensive government measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The setting in South Korea provides noteworthy data from which to analyze the impact of a government response to COVID-19 on elections. All National Assembly members were elected across the country on April 15, 2020, when Korean voters were in the middle of experiencing the explosive phase of the highly infectious COVID-19 pandemic (10,561 confirmed cases, 0.02% of the total population); the elections occurred after a considerable amount of time (52 days) had passed since the first confirmed case was reported on January 20, 2020. The Korean government took many decisive steps that effectively controlled the spread of COVID-19 without a lockdown. The number of confirmed cases reached just over 10,000 in early May, but the number would have reached 11.5 million without the government measures (Hsiang et al., 2020).

Responses to the COVID-19 infection, trust in government, and results of elections also vary by region. COVID-19, which threatens citizens’ health and safety and cripples the national economy, may affect the results of elections directly or indirectly. If a government’s active response minimizes the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, trust in government may increase, which may affect election results indirectly.¹ This is the focus of this article. Targeting nationwide elections held in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conduct an analysis the results of which reveal a mediating effect of trust in government on elections during the pandemic, in addition to the direct effect of the pandemic on the elections, on which several recent studies have focused. Our insights on the mediating effect of trust in government elucidate the relationship between the pandemic and elections.

This article advances various theories and provides empirical findings based on recent literature. First, the article comes at a time when governments have taken various countermeasures against COVID-19 and citizens have become more aware of these actions
since the first confirmed case occurred in each country. This is a time when citizens can reasonably evaluate their governments’ responses to the crisis, and whether or not they have acted in their best interests. Therefore, this article follows the strand of literature based on the government accountability approach.

Second, we perform a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the pandemic on both elections and citizens’ trust in government, including the latter as a mediating variable and evaluating the impact of government measures in response to COVID-19 on elections. This is a theoretical and empirical improvement over recent studies in which the relationship between the crisis and elections was analyzed, or the relationship between trust and elections, but not both.

Third, unlike many recent studies, we include all regions of our focal country, Korea, in our analysis. Thus, the results reflect the extent of trust in government and the severity of COVID-19 by region; we comprehensively analyze the effects of these two constructs on the Korean elections without the distortion caused by regional bias.

Fourth, unlike most recent studies that focused on the role of individual measures, such as lockdowns, in response to the pandemic, this article analyzes government countermeasures on a more general level. We posit that citizens perceive and evaluate their governments’ competence, benevolence, and honesty, three dimensions of trust in government (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013), based on what countermeasures were taken overall. We thereby avoid any narrow judgment based on emotional reactions to or fragile perceptions of the crisis that may result from the use of an individual measure.

We review recent articles in the second section. In the third and fourth sections, we discuss theory and methods, respectively. The fifth section presents the results of our analysis and is followed by the conclusion in the sixth section.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

We review recent published or working papers in social sciences from January to December 2020 that studied the effects of COVID-19 on trust in government/political trust (hereafter, articles on trust) or the effects of the pandemic on the outcomes of elections (hereafter, articles on elections). We used key terms (COVID-19, pandemic, political trust, trust in government, or elections) to conduct a Google Scholar search for the articles. Among the initially identified articles, we chose a total of 17 for review, excluding those from different research fields or those that deviated from the focal research topic.

Table 1 presents a summary of the 17 recent articles. Twelve of these are articles on trust (e.g., Amat et al., 2020; Bol et al., 2021; De Vries et al., 2020). The remaining five focused on elections (e.g., the French election: Adam-Troian et al., 2020; the American election: Brodeur et al., 2020). While most recent studies focused on one country (e.g., Germany: Bove & Riccardo, 2020; the Netherlands: Schraff, 2020; New Zealand: Sibley et al., 2020), some studies included a large number of countries (e.g., Bol et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2020). Regardless of the number of countries, the reviewed studies have the following five characteristics.

First, they described the “rally-around-the-flag” effect or the accountability effect, both of which help to explain citizens’ choices of or trust in political leaders (government) during periods of crisis.
| Author              | Target country/period | Type and coverage of election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on election | Mediating effect of trust on election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on trust | Direct effect of government response to COVID-19 on trust or election | "Rally around the flag" effect or accountability effect | Voter turnout | Political preference or other |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Adam-Troian et al. (2020) | France/March 15, 2020 | Municipal election (first round)/most counties analyzed | Positive effect on right-wing supporters | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | COVID-19 threat is favorable to right-wing party |
| Amat et al. (2020) | Spain/March 20–28, 2020 | N.A. | N.A. | Negative effect | N.A. | Accountability effect | N.A. | Those who personally experience COVID-19 show lower trust |
| Bækgaard et al. (2020) | Denmark/around March 11, 2020 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | Positive effect of lockdown | "Rally around the flag" effect | N.A. | Spillover effect of trust in government to other institutions |
| Bol et al. (2021) | 15 European countries/around lockdown date (March 2–April 3, 2020) | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | Positive effect of lockdown | Accountability effect | N.A. | Lockdown has no effect on traditional left-right attitudes |
| Author                  | Target country/period | Type and coverage of election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on election | Mediating effect of trust on election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on trust | Direct effect of government response to COVID-19 on trust or election | “Rally around the flag” effect or accountability effect | Voter turnout | Political preference or other |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Bove and Di Leo (2020)  | Germany/ March 20–31, 2020 | N.A.                          | N.A.                                 | N.A.                                 | N.A.                             | Negative effect of quarantine                                | Accountability effect                                   | N.A.          | N.A.                        |
| Brodeur et al. (2020)   | USA/ November 11, 2020 | Presidential election/ nationwide analysis | Negative effect on incumbent         | N.A.                                 | N.A.                             | N.A.                                                          | Accountability effect                                   | N.A.          | N.A.                        |
| De Vries et al. (2020)  | Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Spain/ March 5–25, 2020 | N.A.                          | N.A.                                 | N.A.                                 | N.A.                             | Positive effect of lockdown in Italy on trust in other four countries | “Rally around the flag” effect                          | N.A.          | Results are not in line with those of Bove and Di Leo (2020) on Germany and Amat et al. (2020) on Spain |
| Devine et al. (2020)    | N.A. (review early literature) | N.A.                          | N.A.                                 | N.A.                                 | Review early literature on this   | Review early literature on lockdown effect                     | Review early literature on this                         | N.A.          | N.A.                        |
| Author               | Target country/period | Type and coverage of election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on election | Mediating effect of trust on election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on trust or election | Direct effect of government response to COVID-19 on trust or election | "Rally around the flag" effect | Voter turnout | Political preference or other |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Esaiasson et al. (2021) | Sweden/February 24–March 10 in initial phase and March 31–April 14 in acute phase | N.A.                           | N.A.                                 | Positive effect                      | N.A.                                           | Positive effect of "Rally around the flag" effect                  | Trust increases in both the upward and downward trends of confirmation |
| Fernandez-Navia et al. (2020) | Spain/June 12, 2020 | Municipal election/partial (Basque Country only) | No effect found | N.A. | N.A. | No effect found | Lower turnout in regions with confirmed cases | Left-wing supporters are more worried about COVID-19 |
| Gamson (1969)        | France/May 17, 2020  | Regional election (second round)/partial regions analyzed | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | Positive effect of harder lockdown | Higher turnout in regions with harder lockdown | Results are not in line with Adam-Troian et al. (2020) on France |
| Author | Target country/period | Type and coverage of election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on election | Mediating effect of trust on election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on trust | Direct effect of government response to COVID-19 on trust or election | “Rally around the flag” effect or accountability effect | Voter turnout | Political preference or other |
|--------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Han et al. (2020) | 23 Countries/ April 10–May 11 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | Positive effect of government’s good response to COVID-19 | Accountability effect | N.A. | N.A. |
| Karwowski et al. (2020) | Poland, USA/ March 12 (Poland), March 13, 2020 (USA) | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | Partially positive effect on right-wing candidate (significant in Poland only, not in USA) | N.A. | “Rally around the flag” effect | N.A. | Pandemic elevates anxiety and indirectly promotes social conservatism to support right-wing presidential candidates |
| Leininger and Schaub (2020) | Germany/ March 15, 2020 | Municipal election/ partial (Bavaria State only) | Positive effect on dominant party | N.A. | N.A. | Positive effect of school closure | N.A. | N.A. | COVID-19 does not benefit the incumbents of other parties |

(Continues)
| Author               | Target country/period | Type and coverage of election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on election | Mediating effect of trust on election | Direct effect of COVID-19 on trust | Direct effect of government response to COVID-19 on trust or election | "Rally around the flag" effect or accountability effect | Voter turnout | Political preference or other |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Schraff (2020)      | The Netherlands/March 1–30, 2020 | N.A.                          | N.A.                                  | N.A.                                | N.A.                             | Positive effect of lockdown                                           | "Rally around the flag" effect                  | N.A.           | Criticizes Bol et al. (2021)   |
| Sibley et al. (2020)| New Zealand/March 26–April 12, 2020 | N.A.                          | N.A.                                  | N.A.                                | N.A.                             | Positive effect of strong and cohesive lockdown in response to COVID-19 | Accountability effect                           | N.A.           | N.A.                          |
| Yam et al. (2020)   | 11 Countries/January 1–30 April, 2020 | N.A.                          | N.A.                                  | N.A.                                | N.A.                             | Positive correlation (not causal analysis)                           | N.A.                                            | N.A.           | N.A.                          |
| c.f. This article   | South Korea/April 15, 2020 | General election/nationwide analysis | Negative effect without a mediator/no effect with a mediator | Trust mediates the outcome for incumbents positively | Negative effect | Positive effect of government's good response to COVID-19 | Accountability effect | Higher turnout in the 2020 general elections | Analyses both direct effects of COVID-19 and mediating effects of trust on elections |

Note: Alphabetically ordered. Abbreviation: N.A., not applicable.
Second, this recent research focused on particular aspects of the relationships among COVID-19, trust and elections, including the direct impact of COVID-19 on elections, the direct impact of the pandemic on trust, and the direct impact of governments' responses to the pandemic on trust. What we note here is that no recent research has studied the mediating effect of trust on elections.

Third, as for the articles on elections, many recent studies focused on only a few regions in their analyses (Fernandez-Navia et al., 2020; Giommoni & Gabriel, 2020; Leininger & Schaub, 2020). Only Adam-Troian et al. (2020) and Brodeur et al. (2020) conducted nationwide research on France and the United States of America, respectively. The number of confirmed cases is not uniformly distributed region by region within a country, however. The severity of the pandemic varies from region to region. Therefore, analyses of the relationships among the pandemic, trust, and elections based on only a few regions may produce less generalizable results.

Fourth, most of the articles on trust focused on only some possible government measures in response to COVID-19, such as lockdown and quarantine (Bækgaard et al., 2020; Bol et al., 2021; Bove & Riccardo, 2020; De Vries et al., 2020; Devine et al., 2020; Leininger & Schaub, 2020; Schraff, 2020).

Fifth, some recent literature studied the impact of the pandemic on political preferences (Adam-Troian et al., 2020; Bol et al., 2021; Karwowski et al., 2020) or voter turnout (Fernandez-Navia et al., 2020; Giommoni & Gabriel, 2020). For a detailed recent literature review, please see online Supporting Information Materials.

THEORY

Trust in government during the pandemic

Trust in government as a research construct represents positive perceptions of the intentions and actions of the government in power (Easton, 1965). There are numerous dimensions to trust in government, but the three most widely recognized are competence, benevolence, and honesty (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013). First, most studies analyzing factors affecting trust in government emphasized competence, which may be interpreted as efficiency (Gamson, 1969), ability (Kim & Voorhees, 2011; Mayer et al., 1995), and results (Shaw, 1997). These three subfactors are all related to performance (Mahmud, 2021; Zhai, 2019). It is intuitively reasonable to assume that citizens’ assessment of their government’s competence and performance in responding to the COVID-19 crisis has an effect on public trust in that government. Second, benevolence is perceived as the government putting citizens before itself and serving them with genuine care. It can be expressed as commitment (Levi, 1998), care (Peters et al., 1997), and voice for citizens (Volodin, 2019). Third, an honest government is transparent about its intentions and consistent in its actions. The concept of honesty also encompasses creditability (Mayer et al., 1995) and adherence to ethics (Tyler, 1998).

Trust in government has the following characteristics: First, it may be affected by other variables. Partisanship and exogenous shocks such as economic crisis are known to affect trust in government (Uslaner, 2010). Therefore, other variables should be appropriately controlled when analyzing it (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005). Second, it has both objective and subjective aspects. While the actions or policies of a government and their consequences are relatively objective, the intentions behind these actions or policies and citizens’ awareness of them are
subjective. Of the three factors affecting trust in government, competence is objective, while benevolence and honesty are subjective (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013). Third, trust in government may vary. Even if citizens do not explicitly trust their government, they can implicitly trust it. Explicit trust is based on assessment of current government activities, while implicit trust corresponds to a stable, long-term disposition toward the government. Since trust in government may be explicitly expressed during elections, this article focuses on explicit trust.

Government response to COVID-19 can change citizens’ perceptions of trust in government. First, citizens may recognize the government’s competence by the quantity and quality of their input and output. For example, the Korean government implemented quick and extensive tests to detect the virus and confirm cases of COVID-19, isolating those infected and their contacts to minimize spread. Consistent and robust distancing as enforced by the Korean government also significantly contributed to reducing the spread of this infectious disease (Lewnard & Nathan, 2020). Second, in examining the government’s response to COVID-19, Korean citizens could determine whether the government was sincere in its efforts to take care of them, or if it put its political interests ahead of their needs. For example, citizens could observe whether or not a political leader was at the forefront, whether the government enforced nondiscriminatory policies on people of different classes, and whether the government was stingy with spending on things such as tests and treatment. Third, citizens could judge whether the government was responding with honesty in its efforts to tackle COVID-19. Governments should be responsible for providing exact information to help the public face this novel situation (Chakraborty & Prasenjit, 2020). Reducing the scale or pace of testing may be perceived as government dishonesty by the electorate.

When the number of confirmed cases affects trust in government during the pandemic, the characteristics of trust in government can be preserved or highlighted in the following respects: First, just as trust in government may be affected by external shocks and economic crises, it may also be affected by an unprecedented epidemic crisis such as COVID-19. Second, in the government’s response to an economic crisis, which appears to be due to external factors, voters may evaluate the efforts of government subjectively and the results of those efforts objectively. Likewise, they may share objective and subjective evaluations of the government’s response to COVID-19. Third, the government’s response to COVID-19 may have a partial impact, if not a complete one, on the explicit or implicit trust in government of its citizens.

Therefore, we argue that the number of confirmed cases can be used as a proxy for COVID-19 during the pandemic. This number is information that accurately explains the spread and extent of the infection, a number that citizens can recognize and share every hour of every day. It is an indicator that, although not perfect, can help to influence citizens’ perceptions of their government’s competence, benevolence, and honesty during the pandemic.

Zhang et al. (2020) found that government anti-contagion policies significantly and substantially slowed transmission of the COVID-19 infection. They estimated that across six countries (China, France, Iran, Italy, South Korea, and the United States of America), government interventions may have prevented or delayed in the order of 62 million confirmed cases, corresponding to averting of roughly 530 million infections in total. However, while the interest and response of citizens may increase rapidly with reports of more confirmed cases, this interest may be short-lived (Bento et al., 2020). Finally, continuously effective government policies can actually reduce the number of confirmed cases (OECD, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).
Elections during the pandemic: Trust in government as a mediator

A crisis may have a direct or indirect impact on elections. Studies on the direct impact tend to focus on voters' emotional reactions to a crisis. At such times, voters may have two choices. When the nation is in crisis, they rally around the flag (e.g., Mueller, 1970, 1973) of any party. In this case, the crisis may sway voters' support for the ruling party that fights back against the crisis (e.g., Chowanietz, 2011; Feinstein, 2016). On the other hand, negative sentiments about the crisis may limit choices for incumbents (Achen & Larry, 2017; Healy et al., 2010; Wolfers, 2002). In this case, the crisis could work against the ruling party. Many studies, if not all, on emotional responses to a crisis tend to attribute its direct impact on elections to voters' limited perception between exogenous shocks, the controllability of incumbents, and their own circumscribed judgment (Achen & Larry, 2017).

Most prior studies on crises and elections before the COVID-19 pandemic did not sincerely take into account the government's response to the crisis. In addition, in the majority of crises of the past, many governments did not respond or missed their opportunity to respond. Voters may make emotional choices at the polls without any information about the government's response to crises. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is the most obvious global health calamity of the century and the most significant challenge that humankind has faced since World War II (Chakraborty & Prasenjit, 2020). The pandemic has caused enormous damage to people's health, jobs, and well-being, and has triggered the most severe recession in nearly a century. Thus, governments around the world are responding to the pandemic with unprecedented policies designed to slow the growth rate of infections and avoid economic disaster (Zhang et al., 2020). Scientists have long warned that emerging infectious diseases represent a new reality with the potential to cause untold human suffering and economic disaster (Hudecheck et al., 2020), which are major factors that could change the process and outcomes of elections. Political leaders today, therefore, focus on measures that mitigate the worst and highest risks resulting from the pandemic (Landman & Splendore, 2020). At the time of elections held during the pandemic, voters have had access to related information about, and direct experience of policies resulting from the government’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. Voters are able to evaluate the incumbents’ competence/performance, and these evaluations are reflected in their political choices.

Economic crises, social threats, and natural disasters are similar in terms of their effects on elections. Specifically, Ashworth et al. (2018) argued that events such as natural disasters and economic shocks can affect electoral outcomes, even if voters are rational and have instrumental preferences. Such events provide voters with opportunities to learn about incumbents’ reaction to the crisis. In times of crisis, the results of elections can be favorable to the incumbents or the ruling party if voters perceive or expect that they are doing or will do what they should do. Otherwise, the results may be disadvantageous to the incumbents or the ruling party (Achen & Larry, 2017; Bellucci et al., 2012). Governments are “accountable” if voters can discern whether governments are acting in their interest and sanction them appropriately, such that those incumbents who act in the best interest of the citizens win re-election and those who do not lose it (Przeworski et al., 1999).

Trust in government, as an explanatory variable, may affect the outcomes of elections (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Hetherington, 1998), while as a dependent variable, it may be affected by those outcomes (Citrin & Donald, 1986). We consider trust in government as an explanatory variable for the following reasons: First, partisanship is a critical factor underlying trust in government. However, it may have less effect during elections held under exceptional
circumstances (e.g., candidate-centered composition: Wattenberg (2013); divided government: Fiorina (1981); or unprecedented COVID-19 crisis: Budi and Pamungkas (2020)) than at other times. Second, other variables that are expected to affect trust in government may also be less likely to affect it during an election held at crisis times than at other times. Demographic and sociological factors such as population and education can be controlled in an analysis such as ours. Third, we are interested in the influence of COVID-19 and the government’s response to COVID-19 on the results of elections. Looking at the remarkable recent experiences in Korea, we can consider this relationship from the time between the initial outbreak of COVID-19 (earlier) to the time of the elections (later). Given this, we argue that the COVID-19 crisis, which is mediated by trust in government, had an indirect impact on the elections. Different results can be obtained when analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on elections depending on whether or not trust in government mediates election outcomes.

Trust in government affects not only presidential elections but also parliamentary elections. When people are encouraged to think about the “mess in Washington,” for example, the pervasiveness of these appeals at the congressional level may work against White House incumbents. In effect, candidates in parliamentary elections often explicitly encourage voters to evaluate them based on their trust in government (Hetherington, 1998).

METHODS

Model and analysis

We analyze the direct and indirect effects that COVID-19 may have on the results of elections. Pandemic-related factors may directly affect the results of elections, or indirectly affect these results through the mediating role of trust in government. The model of analysis is shown in Figure 1. In general, regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) are widely used methods to test for mediating effects. In analyzing a mediating variable, regression analyses may be used based on the steps presented by Baron and Kenny (1986). However, there is no appropriate way to assess the goodness of fit of the model, and measurement error regarding the variables may be unavoidable, which may affect the analysis results. SEM is based on the relationship between functions expressed in conceptual models, path diagrams, and mathematical equations, whereas standard regression analysis is based on statistical relationships and the conditional expected value. Thus, SEM is more appropriate than regression analysis when a mediating effect is hypothesized, direct and indirect effects occur concurrently and the mediator contributes to both the cause and the intervention of the outcome (Gunzler et al., 2013).

The path diagram in Figure 1 depicts the causal relationships among three variables: confirmed cases of COVID-19 ($x_i$), trust in government ($z_i$), and results of elections ($y_i$). All variables that are affected by other variables ($z_i$ and $y_i$) are endogenous, whereas variables that have no effect on other variables ($x_i$) are exogenous.

The SEM for the $i$th subject ($1 < i < n$) is given by:

$$z_i = \beta_0 + \beta_{xz} x_i + \varepsilon_{z_i}.$$  
$$y_i = \gamma_0 + \gamma_{yz} z_i + \gamma_{xy} x_i + \varepsilon_{yi}.$$
We assume uncorrelated error terms ($\varepsilon_{zt}$, $\varepsilon_{yi}$) and multivariate normality for the error terms; this is a necessary underlying condition of the definitions of direct, indirect, and total effects. The two structural equations are linked together, and inference is simultaneous, unlike the case with two independent standard regression equations.

The direct effect, $\gamma_{xy}$, is the pathway from the exogenous variable to the outcome while controlling for the mediator. The indirect effect describes the pathway from the exogenous variable to the outcome through the mediator. This path is represented as the product of $\beta_{xz}$ and $\gamma_{zy}$. Finally, the total effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effects of the exogenous variable on the outcome, $\gamma_{xy} + \beta_{xz}\gamma_{zy}$.

As the assumption of sequential ignorability might be violated in the model, we try to correct for the possibility of the violation by increasing $N$ and reflecting in the model that previous voting results affect trust in the government. In other words, the model includes the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the results of the previous 2016 elections, thereby demonstrating the effect of trust in government. Additionally, there may be potential confounders that undermine causal inference. This issue of potential confounders can be resolved by case and timing specificity. To begin, population density or movement between regions is a potential variable that may affect only the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. Seoul, with its high population density and high mobility, had a relatively low number of confirmed cases in comparison to other regions. Furthermore, the target period of analysis was the early stages of COVID-19 transmission, when central government-level policies were implemented rather than local government-level policies.

**DATA**

The data set ($N = 228$) was developed using basic data from Korean local governments. The data most recently disclosed to the public was used for most variables. The number of confirmed cases by region, the independent variable, was obtained from the homepages and
SNS of each local government. Data for trust in government, the mediating variable, was obtained using a question from a survey for internal policy development by a major party conducted just before the 2020 elections. The results of the survey are not disclosed to the public, but we obtained permission to utilize the results in our analysis for just one question. The results of the elections, the dependent variable, were obtained from the National Election Commission of Korea (http://info.nec.go.kr). Data for the control variables were obtained from the Korea Statistics Information System (http://kosis.kr) and the Local Finance Integrated Open System (http://lofin.mois.go.kr).

Variables

Independent variable (confirmed cases of COVID-19)

We used the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, calculated by the Korean government as of midnight on April 7, 2020 and released the next morning. We also additionally tried to include the ratio of the number of confirmed cases per 1000 persons. However, both the numerical value and the ratio yielded the same results, so only the numerical value is included here for convenience. Given that the date (April 7) was 3 days before the prevoting days (April 10, 11) and 8 days before the elections (April 15) and that no substantial change occurred in the number of confirmed cases before or after that date, we deemed the number on April 7 to be appropriate for our analysis. Also, we included the cumulative number of confirmed cases, not the number of new confirmed cases per day, because the government's response to COVID-19 was consistent over time. The cumulative number of confirmed cases, therefore, provided a better fit.

Mediator variable (trust in government)

To measure this variable, we used the following survey question: “How much do you trust the government?” Answers were scored based on a five-level Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly distrust) to 5 (strongly trust). The average value representing respondents’ answers by region was calculated on a 100-point basis. Here, “the government” refers to the executive branch headed by the Korean president. The Korean government is composed of three branches: an executive branch, headed by the president; a legislative branch, the National Assembly; and a judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court. However, Koreans are aware that “the government” usually means the executive branch, not the others (Park, 2006). The trust in government variable comprises three dimensions (competence, benevolence, and honesty of government). Therefore, this article employing the trust in government variable as a mediator builds on prior research that partially analyses the relationship between each of these three subdimensions (e.g., competence only) and elections.

Dependent variable (results of elections)

Win/lose refers to whether the ruling party won (1) or lost (0). However, in local governments with two or more constituencies, this variable was calculated as the ratio of seats won by the
ruling party to the total number of seats. **Vote share** is the ratio of the ruling party's votes to all votes in each constituency. The result of the elections is either a win or a loss; there is no alternative. However, additional information on the extent of the increase or decrease in the ruling party's vote share compared to that in previous elections can contribute to a comprehensive analysis of the election results.

**Control variables**

Economic variables, population variables, and political variables may affect the results of elections. We, therefore, included **GRDP**, which is the logarithm of per capita Gross Regional Domestic Product, and **Fiscal independence**, which is the logarithm of the ratio of each local government's own income to its total revenues. Population variables included **Population**, which is the logarithm of each region's population, **The elderly**, which is the ratio of citizens over age 64 to the entire population, and **Gender**, which is the ratio of males to females in the population. Among possible political variables, we included **Win/Lose (2016)** and **Vote Share (2016)**, which represent the election outcome and vote share, respectively, for the ruling party in the previous 2016 parliamentary elections. These two control variables are incorporated to allow examination of the partisanship effect, which is strongly associated with trust in government. Other variables related to political issues were excluded because they may be less important than variables such as economic variables (Przeworski et al., 2000) and because political issues might not arouse voters' interests during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional variations are huge in Korean politics. Local dummy variables (Si, Gun, Gu, and Youngnam) were therefore used to control for the effects of regional factors on election outcomes.

**RESULTS**

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and results of the Pearson correlation analysis. The mean of the independent variable, **Confirmed cases of COVID-19**, is about 43, and regional differences for this variable are large (min: 0, max: 1372). The mean of the mediator variable, **Trust in Government**, is 60.2; the differences for this variable are also large (min: 32.3, max: 90.4). The mean of the first dependent variable, **Win/Lose**, is 49.4%, an increase of 21.8 percentage points compared to that of the 2016 elections (27.6%) in our sample. The mean of the second dependent variable, **Vote Share**, is 47.3%, an increase of 14.9 percentage points compared to that of the 2016 elections (32.4%). There are significantly negative correlation relationships between **Confirmed Cases of COVID-19** and **Results of Elections (Win/Lose, Vote Share)**, and between **Confirmed Cases of COVID-19** and **Trust in Government**. The correlation relationship between the variables **Trust in Government** and **Results of Elections** is significantly positive.

The results of our analysis using SEM to examine the impact of the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and trust in government on election results are presented in Tables 3 and 4. We used the $\chi^2$ test to determine our model's goodness of fit. Among the various goodness of fit testing methods, the $\chi^2$ test is traditionally used for determining statistical significance. In both Tables 3 and 4, the results are statistically significant ($p > \chi^2 = 0.000$). The results of conducting
| Variable | Mean | SD  | Min  | Max  |
|----------|------|-----|------|------|
| **(A) Descriptive statistics (N = 228)** | | | | |
| **Dependent variable** | | | | |
| Win/lose | 0.494 | 0.491 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote share | 47.311 | 15.306 | 13.91 | 90.64 |
| **Independent variable** | | | | |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | 42.873 | 173.719 | 0 | 1372 |
| **Mediator variable** | | | | |
| Trust in government | 60.196 | 18.142 | 32.3 | 90.4 |
| **Control variables** | | | | |
| GRDP | 15.267 | 1.136 | 12.614 | 18.148 |
| Fiscal independence | 20.195 | 12.554 | 4 | 68.9 |
| Population | 11.828 | 1.058 | 9.171 | 13.993 |
| The elderly | 21.013 | 8.149 | 7.6 | 39.9 |
| Gender | 100.452 | 5.536 | 89.7 | 131.4 |
| Win/lose (2016) | 0.276 | 0.410 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote share (2016) | 32.445 | 15.666 | 0 | 63.66 |
| Si | 0.276 | 0.410 | 0 | 1 |
| Gun | 0.360 | 0.481 | 0 | 1 |
| Gu | 0.303 | 0.460 | 0 | 1 |
| Youngnam | 0.307 | 0.462 | 0 | 1 |

| | Win/lose | Vote share | Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | Trust in government |
|----------|----------|------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| **(B) Pearson correlation analysis (N = 228)** | | | | |
| Win/lose | 1 | | | |
| Vote share | 0.758*** | 1 | | |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | −0.187** | −0.249*** | 1 | |
| Trust in government | 0.453*** | 0.749*** | −0.322*** | 1 |

*Note: Win/lose = 1 if ruling party wins the 2020 elections, and otherwise, 0; vote share = ruling party’s votes/all votes in the 2020 elections; GRDP = ln (per capita GRDP); fiscal independence = ln (local government’s own income/total revenues); population = ln (population); the elderly = 100* (population over aged 64/total population); gender = 100* (male population/female population); win/lose (2016) = 1 if ruling party wins the 2016 elections, and otherwise, 0; vote share (2016) = ruling party’s votes/all votes in the 2016 elections; Si = 1 if a local government is an autonomous city; gun = 1 if a local government is a rural district; Gu = 1 if a local government is an urban district; Youngnam = 1 if a local government is in the Youngnam area and zero otherwise.

**p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
the Sobel and Monte Carlo tests to ensure the model’s robustness also show that both are significant. In addition to testing the robustness of the results using the Sobel test, we examined the mediating effect using Baron and Kenny’s approach. All of the results are statistically significant.

TABLE 3 Results of SEM analysis—ruling party’s win or loss

| Coefficient | SE  | z    |
|-------------|-----|------|
| **Dependent variable: Trust in government** |     |      |
| (Constant)  | 143.372*** | 44.536 | 3.220 |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | -0.011*** | 0.003 | -4.040 |
| GRDP        | 0.852     | 2.252 | 0.380 |
| Fiscal independence | -0.349** | 0.137 | -2.560 |
| Population  | -3.158    | 2.281 | -1.380 |
| The elderly | -0.443    | 0.318 | -1.390 |
| Gender      | -0.390    | 0.208 | -1.880 |
| Win/lose (2016) | -8.657*** | 2.988 | -2.900 |
| Vote share (2016) | 0.247 | 0.070 | 3.530 |
| Si          | Ref       |      |      |
| Gun         | 0.263     | 3.320 | 0.080 |
| Gu          | -5.912*** | 2.233 | -2.650 |
| Youngnam    | -21.888*** | 2.008 | -10.900 |

| Coefficient | SE  | z    |
|-------------|-----|------|
| **Dependent variable: Results of elections (ruling party’s win or loss)** |     |      |
| (Constant)  | -217.515** | 102.745 | -2.12 |
| Trust in government | 0.902*** | 0.160 | 5.63 |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | -0.013 | 0.013 | -0.97 |
| GRDP        | 2.607     | 5.751 | 0.45  |
| Fiscal independence | -0.537 | 0.368 | -1.46 |
| Population  | 14.058**  | 5.961 | 2.36  |
| The elderly | 0.004     | 0.659 | 0.01  |
| Gender      | 0.099     | 0.528 | 0.19  |
| Win/lose (2016) | 46.106*** | 6.690 | 6.89 |
| Vote share (2016) | -0.031 | 0.187 | -0.17 |
| Si          | Ref       |      |      |
| Gun         | 4.373     | 7.546 | 0.58  |
| Gu          | 8.500     | 5.977 | 1.42  |
| Youngnam    | -25.995*** | 6.518 | -3.99 |

$p > \chi^2 = 0.000 \ (N = 228)$

**p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
The main question posed in this article is whether the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 directly affected the results of the April 2020 elections in Korea or indirectly affected the results through the mediating role of trust in government (citizens’ perception of the government’s competence, benevolence, and honesty in tackling COVID-19). The answer can

| TABLE 4 Results of SEM analysis—ruling party’s vote share |
|----------------------------------------------------------|
| **Coefficient**  | **SE**  | **z** |
| (Constant)       | 143.372*** | 44.536 | 3.220 |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | -0.011*** | 0.003 | -4.040 |
| GRDP             | 0.852     | 2.252  | 0.380 |
| Fiscal independence | -0.349** | 0.137 | -2.560 |
| Population       | -3.158    | 2.281  | -1.380 |
| The elderly      | -0.443    | 0.318  | -1.390 |
| Gender           | -0.390*   | 0.208  | -1.880 |
| Win/lose (2016)  | -8.657*** | 2.988  | -2.900 |
| Vote share (2016)| 0.247***  | 0.070  | 3.530 |
| Si               | Ref       |        |        |
| Gun              | 0.263     | 3.320  | 0.080 |
| Gu               | -5.912*** | 2.233  | -2.650 |
| Youngnam         | -21.888***| 2.008  | -10.900|

| Dependent variable: Results of elections (ruling party’s vote share) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|
| **Coefficient**  | **SE**  | **z** |
| (Constant)       | -35.745 | 27.397 | -1.30 |
| Trust in government | 0.521*** | 0.041 | 12.65 |
| Confirmed cases of COVID-19 | -0.0003 | 0.002 | -0.15 |
| GRDP             | 1.973*   | 1.195  | 1.65 |
| Fiscal independence | -0.108  | 0.077  | -1.41 |
| Population       | 0.867    | 1.232  | 0.70 |
| The elderly      | -0.048   | 0.177  | -0.27 |
| Gender           | 0.066    | 0.144  | 0.46 |
| Win/lose (2016)  | 4.119**  | 1.713  | 2.40 |
| Vote share (2016)| 0.195*** | 0.042  | 4.70 |
| Si               | Ref       |        |        |
| Gun              | 1.795    | 1.815  | 0.99 |
| Gu               | 5.189*** | 1.269  | 4.09 |
| Youngnam         | -5.694***| 1.228  | -4.64 |

$p > \chi^2 = 0.000 (N = 228)$

*p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
be determined by calculating the estimated coefficients for *Confirmed Cases of COVID-19* and *Trust in Government*, respectively. In Table 3, *Confirmed Cases of COVID-19* has no effect on the ruling party’s win or loss (estimated coefficient: $-0.013$, $p > 0.10$), while *Trust in Government* has a significant positive effect on the ruling party’s win or loss ($0.902$, $p < 0.01$). In Table 4, *Confirmed Cases of COVID-19* has no effect on the ruling party’s vote share (estimated coefficient: $-0.0003$, $p > 0.10$), while *Trust in Government* has a significant positive effect on the vote share ($0.521$, $p < 0.01$).

Our findings show that trust in government completely mediates the effect of the number of COVID-19 confirmation cases on the ruling party’s win/loss and vote share. The prerequisite for a low number of confirmed cases to affect the results of elections positively is that the government must respond effectively and honestly to the COVID-19 crisis, which is naturally followed by increased trust in government. The above results regarding the *Win/Lose* and *Vote Share* variables are summarized in Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

**FIGURE 2** Summary of results—mediating effect on ruling party’s win/loss

**FIGURE 3** Summary of results—mediating effect on ruling party’s vote share
CONCLUSION

Normally, the state of the economy is important to the results of elections. In 2020, however, due to the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic worldwide on both society and the economy, election outcomes turned on the public’s evaluation of governments’ handling of the pandemic (Abramowitz, 2021). Many recent studies analyzed the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on either trust or elections. However, they tended to focus on the direct effects of the pandemic. This article acknowledges the contributions of prior studies and provides the following three enhancements.

To begin, it demonstrates that trust in government mediates the relationship between the government’s counter-response to the COVID-19 crisis and election results. In the new era of the COVID-19 pandemic, voters’ perceptions of the competence, benevolence, and honesty of their government based on the government’s response to COVID-19 may result in increased trust in government, which influences their choices in political leadership.

Second, prior studies tended to analyse the relationship between crises and elections, and between trust in government and elections, separately. This article expands on those studies, analysing the relationships among the COVID-19 crisis (the number of confirmed cases), trust in government (influenced by government response to COVID-19), and elections. Voters’ perceptions of the government’s quality (the effectiveness of the government’s measures to control the pandemic), based on new information about the government’s ability to overcome the crisis (Ashworth et al., 2018), affected trust in government, which affected the results of the April 2020 elections in Korea (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Hetherington, 1998).

Third, we analyzed data by region from a country that held nationwide elections during the pandemic. Although we tested our data based on a microfoundation of preferences at only one point in time in one country, theoretical and empirical explorations of trust and its role in voters’ choices transcend spatial and temporal boundaries (Citrin & Laura, 2018). The results of this study may therefore provide insights for those who have already experienced elections or who may face future elections during the pandemic.

Our findings show that the prerequisite for a low number of confirmed cases to affect the results of elections held during the pandemic positively is that the government must respond effectively and honestly to the COVID-19 crisis, which is naturally followed by increased trust in government. Trust in government determines the willingness of citizens to comply with decisions that have been taken by their political leaders (Verhaegen et al., 2017). Weinberg (2020) argued that trust in political leaders may have contributed to levels of mass behavioral compliance at the height of the COVID-19 crisis. Such trust involves accepting the compromises necessary to enforce policies when society is confronted by large problems, including crises such as a rapidly spreading infectious disease.

As the COVID-19 crisis drags on, government remedies against COVID-19 diversify and accumulate. Citizens’ perceptions of government measures, on the other hand, differ by country or region, and may have a positive or negative impact on elections. This article focuses on trust in government as a mediator to examine the relationship between government measures and elections during the pandemic.

When additional data is gathered, this article can be expanded as follows: First, a comparative study on a global scale is possible. Second, the degree to which each dimension of trust in government (competency, benevolence, and honesty) affects elections can be determined. Third, it is possible to study the relationships among the political/economic characteristics of local governments, numerous dimensions of trust in government and
elections. Fourth, it is also possible to conduct in-depth analyses. For instance, after dividing the sample by individual partisanship using an individual-level survey (electoral winners vs. losers), researchers could conduct a mediation analysis. An analysis of the sample divided by regional partisanship could also be performed.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ORCID
Suhee Kim http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2747-5386

ENDNOTES
1 The context of the government response to COVID-19, trust in government and elections in Korea is described in the online Supporting Information Material.
2 We focus our review on previous papers that analyze elections scheduled for 2020, the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies explore the relationships among the COVID-19 crisis, trust in government and elections, while minimizing other effects.
3 Among the articles on trust, we exclude some in which neither trust in government nor government responses to COVID-19 were the main topic. Among the articles on elections, we exclude some that were unrelated to ordinary election outcomes (e.g., win/loss or vote share) that focused on other factors such as the delay of elections. We also exclude articles that investigated the effects of either trust or elections on COVID-19.
4 However, the rally-round-the-flag effect means that governments are able to be more “right wing” or authoritative as a result of the extra support.
5 For example, voters suffering from crises are not necessarily irrational, but they may be ignorant about both science and politics, which makes them gullible and susceptible to ambitious demagogues who seek to profit from their misery (Achen & Bartels, 2017). Voters may make systematic attribution errors in choice due to exogenous shock (Wolfers, 2002). For example, the degree of impact of global economic growth (exogenous shock) on the chances of an incumbent’s re-election is more than double that of domestic economic growth (Leigh, 2009). An exogenous shock irrelevant to government performance can affect voting behavior. Healy et al. (2010) found that a win in the 10 days before Election Day caused the incumbent to receive an additional 1.61 percentage points of the vote in Senate, gubernatorial and presidential elections.
6 Hetherington (1998) and Bélanger & Nadeau (2005) used the label “political trust” in their articles, but the construct is identical to trust in government as used in this article.
7 Along with the official local governments of Korea, we also include Sejong and Jeju in our sample. This is because the regional and local governments of Sejong and Jeju are respectively identical.
8 No significant changes in Korean politics had occurred (e.g., scandals, length of government tenure, or economic changes) that could account for some of the differences in voting and trust between the pre- and postpandemic periods.
9 Korean local governments may be one of three types (autonomous cities, Si; rural districts, Gun; autonomous urban districts, Gu) (MOIS, 2021).
10 In Korea, regional partisanship is intense in the Honam and Youngnam regions. However, due to the problem of multicollinearity, the Honam dummy variable was not included in the model. The high correlation between the Honam region and trust in government may have affected the results of the regression analysis. In fact, in the results of the analysis including the Honam dummy variable, the sign of the regression coefficient of trust in government was reversed. Therefore, the authors included only the
Youngnam dummy variable to avoid errors due to multicollinearity, analyzing previous election results and vote rate variables to control for regional partisanship as much as possible.

11 We implement Baron and Kenny’s approach as follows: (a) Dependent variable: Results of elections (ruling party’s win or loss). Step 1. Trust in government: Confirmed cases of COVID-19, $B = -0.011$ and $p = 0.0000$. Step 2. Vote share: Trust in government, $B = 0.902$ and $p = 0.0000$. Step 3. Vote share: Confirmed cases of COVID-19, $B = -0.011$ and $p = 0.0000$. Step 2. Vote share: Trust in government, $B = 0.521$ and $p = 0.0000$. Step 3. Vote share: Confirmed cases of COVID-19, $B = -0.000$ and $p = 0.884$.

REFERENCES
Abramowitz, A. I. (2021). It’s the pandemic, stupid! A simplified model for forecasting the 2020 presidential election. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 54*(1), 52–54.

Achen, C., & Bartels, L. (2017). Blind retrospection: Electoral responses to droughts, floods, and shark attacks. In *Democracy for realists* (pp. 116-145). Princeton University Press.

Achen, C. H., & Larry, M. B. (2017). *Blind retsarospection: Electoral responses to droughts, floods, and shark attacks.*

Adam, F., Arenas, A., Falcó-Gimeno, A., & Muñoz, J. (2020). Pandemics meet democracy. Experimental evidence from the COVID-19 crisis in Spain. *SocArXiv.*

Ashworth, S., Ethan, B., & Amanda, F. (2018). Learning about voter rationality. *American Journal of Political Science, 62*(1), 37–54.

Baekgaard, M., Christensen, J., Madsen, J. K., & Mikkelsen, K. S. (2020). Rallying around the flag in times of COVID-19: Societal lockdown and trust in democratic institutions. *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration, 3*(2), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.32.172

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(6), 1173–1182.

Bélanger, É., & Nadeau, R. (2005). Political trust and the vote in multiparty elections: The Canadian case. *European Journal of Political Research, 44*(1), 121–146.

Bellucci, P., Marina, C. L., & Michael, S. (2012). Economic crisis and elections: The European periphery. *Electoral Studies, 31*(3), 469–471.

Bento, A. I., Nguyen, T., Wing, C., Lozano-Rojas, F., Ahn, Y. Y., & Simon, K. (2020). Evidence from internet search data shows information-seeking responses to news of local COVID-19 cases. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 117*(21), 11220–11222.

Bol, D., Giani, M., Blais, A., & Loewen, P. J. (2021). The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy? *European Journal of Political Research, 60*(2), 497–505.

Bove, V., & Di Leo, R. (2020). COVID-19, security threats and public opinions. *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy, 26.* https://doi.org/10.1515/peps-2020-0033

Brodeur, A., Leonardo, B., & Stephen, W. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and US presidential elections. *MetaArXiv.* https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/saxjv

Budi, A., & Pamungkas, W. A. (2020). Partisanship in crisis: Public response to Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, 24*(1), 15–32.

Chakraborty, I., & Prasenjit, M. (2020). COVID-19 outbreak: Migration, effects on society, global environment and prevention. *Science of the Total Environment, 728*(1), 138882.

Chowaniezt, C. (2011). Rallying around the flag or railing against the government? Political parties’ reactions to terrorist acts. *Party Politics, 17*(5), 673–698.

Citrin, J., & Donald, P. G. (1986). Presidential leadership and the resurgence of trust in government. *British Journal of Political Science, 16*(4), 431–453.
Citrin, J., & Laura, S. (2018). Political trust in a cynical age. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21*, 49–70.

De Vries, C. E., Bakker, B. N., Hobolt, S. B., & Arceneaux, K. (2020). Crisis signaling: How Italy’s coronavirus lockdown affected incumbent support in other European countries. *Available at SSRN, 3606149*.

Devine, D., Gaskell, J., Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2020). Trust and the coronavirus pandemic: What are the consequences of and for trust? An early review of the literature. *Political Studies Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929920948684

Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. John Wiley.

Esaiasson, P., Sohliberg, J., Ghersetti, M., & Johansson, B. (2021). How the coronavirus crisis affects citizen trust in institutions and in unknown others: Evidence from ‘the Swedish experiment’. *European Journal of Political Research, 60*(3), 748-760.

Feinstein, Y. (2016). Rallying around the president: When and why do Americans close ranks behind their presidents during international crisis and war? *Social Science History, 40*(2), 305–338.

Fernández-Navia, T., Eduardo, P., & Tercero-Lucas, D. (2020). Too afraid to vote? The effects of COVID-19 on voting behaviour. *Covid Economics, 50*, 155–180.

Fiorina, M. P. (1981). Some problems in studying the effects of resource allocation in congressional elections. *American Journal of Political Science, 25*(3), 543-567.

Futák-Campbell, B. (2021). Facilitating crisis: Hungarian and Slovak securitization of migrants and their implications for EU politics. *International Politics, 1–21*.

Gamson, W. A. (1969). *Power and discontent*. Dorsey.

Giommoni, T., & Gabriel, L. (2020). Lockdown and voting behaviour: A natural experiment on postponed elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Available at SSRN, 3659856*.

Grimmelikhuijsen, S., Porumbescu, G., Hong, B., & Im, T. (2013). The effect of transparency on trust in government: A cross-national comparative experiment. *Public Administration Review, 73*(4), 575-586.

Gunzler, D., Chen, T., Wu, P., & Zhang, H. (2013). Introduction to mediation analysis with structural equation modeling. *Shanghai Archives of Psychiatry, 25*(6), 390.

Han, Q., Zheng, B., Cristea, M., Agostini, M., Belanger, J. J., Gützkow, B., & Leander, P. (2020). Trust in government and its associations with health behaviour and prosocial behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PsyArXiv*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/p5gns

Healy, A. J., Neil, M., & Mo, C. H. (2010). Irrelevant events affect voters’ evaluations of government performance. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 107*(29), 12804–12809.

Hetherington, M. J. (1998). The political relevance of political trust. *American Political Science Review, 92*(4), 791-808.

Hsiang, S., Allen, D., Annan-Phan, S., Bell, K., Bolliger, I., Chong, T., & Wu, T. (2020). The effect of large-scale anti-contagion policies on the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nature, 584*(7820), 262–267.

Hudecheck, M., Sirén, C., Grichnik, D., & Wincent, J. (2020). How companies can respond to the coronavirus. *MIT Sloan Management Review*.

Karwowski, M., Kowal, M., Groyecka, A., Bialek, M., Lebuda, I., Sorokowska, A., & Sorokowski, P. (2020). When in danger, turn right: Covid-19 threat promotes social conservatism and right-wing presidential candidates. *Human Ethology, 35*, 37–48.

Kim, M., & Voorhees, M. (2011). Government effectiveness and institutional trust in Japan, South Korea, and China. *Asian Politics & Policy, 3*(3), 413–432.

Landman, T., & Splendore, L. (2020). Pandemic democracy: Elections and COVID-19. *Journal of Risk Research, 23*, 1–7.

Leigh, A. (2009). Does the world economy swing national elections? *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 71*(2), 163-181.

Leininger, A., & Schaub, M. (2020). Voting at the dawn of a global pandemic. *SocArXiv*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/a32r7

Levi, M. (1998). A state of Trust. In V. Braithwaite and M. Levi (Eds.), *Trust and governance* (pp. 77-101). Russell Sage.

Lewnard, J. A., & Nathan, C. L. (2020). Scientific and ethical basis for social-distancing interventions against COVID-19. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases, 20*(6), 631–633.
Mahmud, R. (2021). What explains citizen trust in public institutions? Quality of government, performance, social capital, or demography. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration, 43*, 1–19.

Mayer, R. C., James, H. D., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(3), 709–734.

MOIS (Korea Ministry of the Interior and Safety). (2021). *Administrative district and population of local governments in Korea*. MOIS.

Mueller, J. E. (1970). Presidential popularity from Truman to Johnson. *The American Political Science Review, 64*(1), 18–34.

Mueller, J. E. (1973). *War, presidents, and public opinion*. John Wiley & Sons.

OECD. (2020, June). *OECD Economic Outlook*.

Park, S. (2006). Perceptions toward government and government trust: Focusing on undergraduate students in Korea. *Korean Public Administration Review, 40*(2), 73–97.

Peters, R. G., Covello, V. T., & McCallum, D. B. (1997). The determinants of trust and credibility in environmental risk communication: An empirical study. *Risk Analysis, 17*(1), 43–54.

Przeworski, A., Alvarez, R. M., Alvarez, M. E., Cheibub, J. A., Limongi, F., & Neto, F. P. L. (2000). *Democracy and development: Political institutions and well-being in the world, 1950-1990* (No. 3). Cambridge University Press.

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C. S., Stokes, S. C., & Manin, B. (Eds.). (1999). *Democracy, accountability, and representation* (2). Cambridge University Press.

Schraff, D. (2020). Political trust during the Covid-19 pandemic: Rally around the flag or lockdown effects? *SocArXiv*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/pu47c

Shaw, R. B. (1997). *Trust in balance: Building successful organizations on results, integrity, and concern*. Jossey-Bass.

Sibley, C. G., Greaves, L. M., Satherley, N., Wilson, M. S., Overall, N. C., Lee, C. H., & Barlow, F. K. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown on trust, attitudes toward government, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 75*(5), 618–630.

Tyler, T. R. (1998). Trust and democratic governance. In V. Braithwaite and M. Levi (Eds.), *Trust and governance* (pp. 269–294). Russell Sage.

Uslaner, E. M. (2010). Trust and the Economic Crisis of 2008. *Corporate Reputation Review, 13*(2), 110-123.

Verhaegen, S., Hooghe, M., & Quintelier, E. (2017). The effect of political trust and trust in European citizens on European identity. *European Political science review, 9*(2), 161–181.

Volodin, D. (2019). Deliberative democracy and trust in political institutions at the local level: evidence from participatory budgeting experiment in Ukraine. *Contemporary Politics, 25*(1), 78–93.

Wattenberg, M. P. (2013). *The rise of candidate-centered politics*. Harvard University Press.

Wolfers, J. (2002). *Are voters rational?: Evidence from gubernatorial elections* (Working Paper No. 1730). Stanford: Graduate School of Business.

Yam, K. C., Jackson, J. C., Barnes, C., Lau, J., Qin, X., & Lee, H. Y. (2020). The rise of COVID-19 is associated with support for world leaders. *ArXiv*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/jhprk

Zhai, Y. (2019). Popular democratic perception matters for political trust in authoritarian regimes. *Politics, 39*(4), 411–429.

Zhang, R., Li, Y., Zhang, A. L., Wang, Y., & Molina, M. J. (2020). Identifying airborne transmission as the dominant route for the spread of COVID-19. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 117*(26), 14857–14863.

**How to cite this article:** Yu, S., Yoo, E. J., & Kim, S. (2022). The effect of trust in government on elections during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Korea. *Asian Politics and Policy, 14*(2), 175–198. https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12631