



Section of the conference: Political Sciences

Sekcja konferencji: Nauki polityczne

How to cite: Marinaki, M., & Pitsou, I. (2025). Civil rights and COVID-19 pandemic. *World Conference on Emerging Science, Innovation and Policy 2025*. Futurity Research Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16556043>

Civil Rights and Covid-19 pandemic

Maria Marinaki¹, Charikleia Pitsou²

¹Msc, General Hospital of Heraklion "Venizeleio-Panania, Greece, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2896-4906>

²PhD, Teaching Staff, Department of Educational Sciences and Social Work, University of Patras, Greece, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0369-316X>

Accepted: July 3, 2025 | **Published:** July 20, 2025 | **Language:** English

Abstract: During the Covid-19 pandemic, governments were called upon to implement restrictive measures that resulted in limitations on civil rights and freedoms. Within this context, the present quantitative study investigates the views of Greek citizens regarding the restriction of civil rights, the role of digital surveillance, and the digital tools adopted as part of the measures imposed during the second wave of Covid-19. The findings reveal that participants perceived a significant limitation of their civil rights. They considered the restrictions stemming from digital surveillance to be moderate to substantial and expressed a neutral stance regarding the use of digital tools to restrict civil rights. These findings may contribute to political decision-making.

Keywords: Covid-19, civil rights, restrictive measures, digital surveillance, public opinion, Greece, political decision-making, quantitative research.

Introduction

The protection of civil rights constitutes the cornerstone of the modern rule of law and serves as a critical factor in safeguarding democratic governance and human dignity (Dagtoglou, 2012;



Chrysogonos, 2006). Despite numerous international and national regulations, their practical implementation remains in constant negotiation, especially during times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The internationalization of civil rights protection accelerated after World War II. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) established the foundational value framework, later complemented by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). However, the non-binding nature of the Declaration and the uneven implementation of the Covenants reveal the gap between theory and practice. States' selective compliance and the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms often diminish their practical significance (Raikos, 2011; Chrysogonos, 2006). Despite the existence of monitoring bodies (such as the Human Rights Committee for the ICCPR), enforcement remains primarily moral rather than legally coercive. In European Law the Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) represented a landmark development, introducing the right of individual application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was rendered legally binding through the Lisbon Treaty (2007), broadening protection beyond classic civil rights to include, for example data and digital privacy rights. However, its application is limited to actions of the Union and members state a restriction that often generates ambiguity. In Greek National Law, the safeguarding of civil rights has evolved continuously, from the revolutionary constitutions of the 19th century to the current Constitution of 1975 (as revised in 2019). Article 2 enshrines the value of the human person, while Article 5 guarantees the right to free personal development and personal liberty. The constitutional supremacy of individual rights, reinforced by the supra-legislative status of international conventions (Article 28 of the Constitution), theoretically provides a robust protective framework. In Greece, natural persons are among the holders of individual rights. Nevertheless, the exercise of civil rights is not absolute. Within the framework of an organized society, rights are subject to limitations in order to ensure harmonious coexistence and the protection of other legal goods. The Greek Constitution includes restrictions on individual rights, which are linked to the protection and interests of the broader community, thus expressly establishing the concept of the social function of individual rights. The social limitation refers to the conflict between civil rights and the interests of the community. It indicates the need to override individual self-determination when there is a prevailing public interest or the need to protect the rights of third parties (Katrougalos, 2006). Safeguarding and protection of public health constitute an essential aspect of public interest and, according to constitutional provisions, justify the restriction of fundamental civil rights (Dagtoglou, 2012; Thanos-Christofilou, 2021). Therefore, the limitation of civil rights is justified in cases of a threat to public health (Anthopoulos, 2020; Venizelos, 2020; Chia & Oyeniran, 2020; Mantzoufas & Pavlopoulos, 2020; Valerio, 2020). A characteristic example is the prohibition of outdoor assemblies, which is provided by the Greek Constitution in cases there is an imminent serious threat to public safety or a significant disturbance of socioeconomic life (Manitakis, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the limits of this framework. Extensive restrictions on freedoms (mobility, religious worship, assembly) sparked intense debate concerning the necessity and proportionality of restricted measures (Kontiadis, 2020). The use of digital surveillance tools, such as tracing/ mobile software applications and drones, also highlighted new challenges to privacy and personal data protection (Logotheti et al., 2020; Sharma & Bashir, 2020). As pandemic-related digital surveillance measures involve the automated processing of personal data, data protection laws are deemed essential in order to ensure the lawful and ethical processing of such data (Martinez et al., 2020; Zwitter & Gstrein, 2020).



Studies have examined the multifaceted impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on fundamental rights and daily life during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Greece, two large-scale nationwide surveys conducted by diaNEOsis (2020a; 2020b) highlighted significant concerns among citizens regarding the long-term negative effects on democracy, freedom, security, health, and economic well-being. Internationally, studies by Gondim Dos Santos et al. (2021), Flaxman et al. (2020), and Hong et al. (2021) explored the tension between public health measures and civil liberties, revealing that while lockdowns and school closures were effective in reducing transmission, they also raised serious concerns over the restriction of movement, privacy, and freedom of assembly. Furthermore, researches (Engler et al., 2021; Gustafsson, 2020; Sebhatu et al., 2020; Vasilopoulos et al., 2023), and the global survey "Youth & Covid-19" (Decent Jobs for Youth, 2020) emphasized the profound socioeconomic and psychological impacts on young people, including increased anxiety, reduced income, and restricted rights to participation, religion, and information. Overall, these findings underscore the complex balance between protecting public health and safeguarding civil rights and freedoms during a global health crisis.

Based on the above, the aim of the present study was to examine the views of Greek citizens regarding the restriction of individual rights, the role of digital surveillance, and the digital tools adopted as a result of the measures imposed during the second wave of Covid-19.

Research Aim and Research Questions

According to the aforementioned aim of the study, the following research questions emerged:

1st research question: What are the views of citizens residing in Greece regarding the restriction of civil rights during the second wave of Covid-19?

2nd research question: What are the views of citizens residing in Greece regarding the restriction of civil rights due to digital surveillance during the second wave of Covid-19?

3rd research question: What are the views of citizens residing in Greece regarding the digital tools used to restrict civil rights during the second wave of Covid-19?

A total of 329 citizens participated in the present study (during the second wave of the pandemic), the majority of whom were women, aged up to 30 years (62.61%), unmarried (68.69%), residing in urban areas (67.48%), university graduates (52.89%), unemployed (47.42%), and not belonging to a vulnerable population group (81.16%). However, 79.64% reported having someone in their immediate environment who did belong to a vulnerable group. Finally, most citizens reported that they had not been infected themselves (96.66%) and did not have someone in their immediate environment who had been infected at the time of their participation in the study (81.46%). The construction of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to the participants was based on the study by Logotheti (2020) and the United Nations Human Rights questionnaire (2020). The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 30 individuals. Its reliability was deemed acceptable both in the pilot phase and in the final distribution phase. Specifically, the dimension "Restriction of individual rights" showed an internal reliability of $\alpha = 0.861$ in the pilot phase and $\alpha = 0.876$ in the final phase. The dimension "Restriction of rights due to digital surveillance" demonstrated $\alpha = 0.630$ in the pilot phase and $\alpha = 0.749$ in the final phase, while the dimension "Means of restricting individual rights" exhibited $\alpha = 0.849$ in the pilot phase and $\alpha = 0.799$ in the final phase. Throughout the study, all necessary ethical considerations related to the nature of the research and the psychology of the participants were observed (Yip et al., 2016).



Research Results

1st research question: Respondents reported to a very high or extremely high degree that their freedom of (trans)movement was restricted ($M=4.46\pm 0.80$). They also stated to a very high degree that their freedom to express their personality in terms of social life was restricted, specifically regarding participation in family and friendly gatherings ($M=4.36\pm 0.92$), as well as participation in clubs and organizations ($M=4.19\pm 1.14$). Additionally, they reported to a very high degree that their personal freedom was restricted due to the quarantine ($M=4.15\pm 1.04$), that civil rights were restricted during the quarantine ($M=3.94\pm 1.06$), that pandemic control measures were implemented against human rights ($M=3.81\pm 1.11$), that they felt their rights were violated due to quarantine ($M=3.79\pm 1.15$), and that restrictions on public gatherings affected freedom of expression ($M=3.74\pm 1.17$). Furthermore, respondents indicated to a moderate to very high degree that their freedom to express their personality in terms of economic life was restricted ($M=3.60\pm 1.17$), that restrictions on private gatherings affected freedom of expression ($M=3.51\pm 1.26$), and that their right to privacy was restricted ($M=3.41\pm 1.31$). Moreover, they reported to a moderate degree that there was a violation of citizens' privacy ($M=3.32\pm 1.26$), that their religious freedom was restricted due to quarantine ($M=3.19\pm 1.54$), that there was a disruption of psychosocial services ($M=3.18\pm 1.23$), and of health services ($M=2.86\pm 1.23$). Finally, respondents indicated to a low to moderate degree that civil rights were respected during the quarantine period ($M=2.41\pm 1.03$).

2nd research question: The respondents stated to a very high degree that the use of digital technology entails a significant risk of violating the right to privacy ($M=3.83\pm 1.06$), while to a moderate to very high degree they indicated that the use of digital technology entails a significant risk of restricting freedom of (trans)movement ($M=3.60\pm 1.13$) and that digital surveillance measures were aimed at manipulating citizens ($M=3.46\pm 1.19$). Finally, they stated to a moderate degree that digital surveillance measures were not targeted at serving the best interests of citizens ($M=3.30\pm 1.14$) and that the use of digital technology did not contribute to the promotion and protection of public health ($M=3.07\pm 1.16$).

3rd research question: Respondents stated to a very high degree that the use of drones to monitor gatherings led to the restriction of civil rights ($M=4.03\pm 1.14$), and that monitoring citizens' movements via SMS led to the restriction of civil rights ($M=3.95\pm 1.18$). They also stated to a moderate to very high degree that contact tracing contributed to the protection of public health ($M=3.57\pm 1.11$), while to a moderate degree they indicated that contact tracing ($M=3.34\pm 1.20$) and the creation of the National Covid-19 Patient Registry led to the restriction of civil rights ($M=3.30\pm 1.21$). Finally, they stated to a moderate degree that the creation of the National Covid-19 Patient Registry ($M=3.21\pm 1.11$), the monitoring of citizens' movements via SMS ($M=2.95\pm 1.22$), and the use of drones to monitor gatherings contributed to the protection of public health ($M=2.81\pm 1.31$).

The following are the descriptive statistics of the three dimensions. The results show that respondents believe to a very high degree that there was a restriction of civil rights ($M=3.69\pm 0.69$), while they indicated a moderate to very high degree of restriction of rights due to digital surveillance ($M=3.45\pm 0.80$). Finally, they expressed neutrality regarding the use of digital tools to restrict civil rights ($M=3.26\pm 0.76$).

Conclusions

The purpose of the specific study was to examine the views of Greek citizens regarding the restriction of individual rights, the role of digital surveillance, and the digital tools adopted as a result of the



measures imposed during the second wave of Covid-19. The responses of the participants revealed that their freedom of (trans)movement, as well as their freedom to express their personality in their social lives -including participation in family and friendly gatherings, clubs, and organizations- was restricted, along with their personal freedom due to quarantine. In addition, they stated that their civil rights were restricted during the quarantine period, pandemic control measures were implemented against human rights, they felt their rights were violated due to quarantine, restrictions on public gatherings affected freedom of expression, and their freedom to express their personality in their economic lives was also limited. There was also a tendency to agree with the view that restrictions on private gatherings affected freedom of expression, the right to privacy was restricted, and civil rights were not respected during the quarantine period. A similar result emerged from the nationwide surveys conducted by diaNEOsis. Specifically, the findings of the present study align more closely with the second nationwide survey by diaNEOsis, as it was conducted around the same period as the present study (during the second wave of the pandemic) (diaNEOsis, 2020a; diaNEOsis, 2020b). Similar results were also found in the studies by Hong et al. (2021), Sharma & Bashir (2023), and Decent Jobs for Youth (2023), regarding the impact of Covid-19 on human rights, despite the positive outcomes in controlling the spread of the virus. Regarding the restriction of rights due to digital surveillance, respondents indicated that the use of digital technology entails a significant risk of both violating the right to privacy and restricting freedom of (trans)movement. Furthermore, there was a tendency to agree with the view that digital surveillance measures were targeted at manipulating citizens. With respect to the tools used to restrict civil rights, respondents mainly stated that both the use of drones to monitor gatherings and the monitoring of citizens' movements via SMS led to the restriction of civil rights. However, they generally agreed that contact tracing contributed to the protection of public health.

As we face rising collective threats from viruses, terrorism etc. uncovering and reinforcing mechanisms that safeguard individual freedoms and civil liberties is more vital than ever. The protection of public health is a supreme obligation of every state. Nevertheless, it should not be used as a pretext for the unjustified restriction of fundamental rights. Emergency measures that lead to severe deviations from fundamental rights and freedoms should be employed only as a last measure and only after it has been demonstrated that no less restrictive alternatives are available. Any restrictive measures on civil rights must be lawful, necessary, respect the principle of proportionality be regularly re-evaluated, and remain strictly time-limited (Chia & Oyeniran, 2020; Kontiadis, 2020; Mbote-Kameri & Kipkoech, 2020; Valerio, 2020). A key prerequisite is the justification and public communication of these measures by the state. Measures should be based on scientific evidence and respect human dignity as well as the protection and safety of vulnerable populations (Hostmaelingen & Bentzen, 2020; Mbote-Kameri & Kipkoech, 2020; Valerio, 2020). Transparency, public participation in decision-making, the provision of information, and access to information are important factors that strengthen citizens' trust in the state and consequently improve adherence to and the effectiveness of the measures (Chia & Oyeniran, 2020; Sekela et al., 2020).

This study presents certain limitations related to the demographics of the participants. Moreover, it reflects respondents' views only from the second wave of Covid-19. A longitudinal study could shed more light on these issues, as could further research focusing on the reasons citizens believe led states to adopt specific measures during the Covid-19 pandemic.



References

- Amnesty International. (2024). *Russia: Surge in abuse of anti-terrorism laws to suppress dissent*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/russia-surge-in-abuse-of-anti-terrorism-laws-to-suppress-dissent/> Amnesty International
- Anthopoulos, Ch. (2020, April 26). *Pandimía kai dikaiómatá stin ygeía* [Пандемія та право на здоров'я] [in Greek]. https://www.constitutionalism.gr/2020-04-26_anthopoulos-pandimia-dikaiomata-ygeias/ constitutionalism.gr
- Chia, T., & Oyeniran, O. I. (2020). Human health versus human rights: An emerging ethical dilemma arising from coronavirus disease pandemic. *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, 14, 100511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemep.2020.100511>
- Constitution of Greece. (n.d.). *The Constitution of Greece*. Hellenic Parliament. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Syntagma/>
- Council of Europe. (1950). *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG
- Dagtoglou, P. D. (2012). *Syntagmatikó dikáio: Atomiká dikaiómata* [Конституційне право: індивідуальні права] [in Greek]. Sakkoulas.
- Decent Jobs for Youth. (2020). *Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being. Survey report*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf
- dos Santos, G. L. J., Messetti, S. A. P., Adami, F., Bezerra, P. M. I., Maia Souto, G. G. C. P., Tristan-Cheever, E., & Carlos de Abreu, L. (2021). Collision of fundamental human rights and the right to health access during the novel coronavirus pandemic. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8, 570243. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.570243>
- diaNEOsis. (2020a). *Pós zoún oi Ellines stin pandimía?* [Як живуть греки під час пандемії?] [in Greek]. https://www.dianeosis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COVID_19_brochure.pdf
- diaNEOsis. (2020b). *Panelladikí érevna koinís gnómis gia tin pandemía tou koronoíou - 2o kúma* [Загальнонаціональне опитування громадської думки про пандемію коронавірусу - 2-га хвиля] [in Greek]. https://www.dianeosis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/public_opinion_covid-19_v8-17.12.2020.pdf
- Engler, S., Brunner, P., Loviat, R., Abou-Chadi, T., Leemann, L., Glaser, A., & Kübler, D. (2021). Democracy in times of the pandemic: Explaining the variation of COVID-19 policies across European democracies. *West European Politics*, 44(5-6), 1077-1102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1900669>
- European Parliament. (2008, February 20). *European Parliament resolution on the Treaty of Lisbon (2007/2286(INI))* [Resolution]. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0055_EN.html
- Flaxman, S., Mishra, S., Gandy, A., et al. (2020). Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe. *Nature*, 584, 257-261. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2405-7>



- Gustafsson, M. (2020). *Young workers in the coronavirus crisis: Findings from the Resolution Foundation's coronavirus survey*. Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis/> Resolution Foundation
- Hong, S.-H., Hwang, H., & Park, M.-H. (2021). Effect of COVID-19 non-pharmaceutical interventions and the implications for human rights. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(1), 217. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010217> PubMed
- Hostmaelingen, N., & Bentzen, H. B. (2020). How to operationalise human rights for COVID-19 measures. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(7), e003048. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003048> gh.bmj.com
- Katrougalos, G. S. P. (2006). *Ta koinoniká dikaiómata* [Соціальні права] [in Greek]. Ant. Sakkoulas.
- Kontiadis, X. (2020, April). *Dikaiómata kai pandemía* [Права людини і пандемія] [in Greek]. <https://www.dianeosis.org/2020/04/dikaiomata-kai-pandimia/> Dianeosis
- Logotheti, A., Krontiris, G., Vamvaka, E., Terzidou, K., Kakavoulis, K., Chelioudakis, L., Baka, M., & Zacharopoulou, M. (2020, April 22). *COVID-19 & psifiaká dikaiómata stin Elláda* [COVID-19 та цифрові права в Греції] [Report, in Greek]. Homo Digitalis. https://www.homodigitalis.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HomoDigitalis_Report_COVID19_and_Digital_Rights_in_Greece_22.04.2020_Final.pdf homodigitalis.gr
- Martinez-Martin, N., Wieten, S., Magnus, D., & Cho, M. K. (2020). Digital contact tracing, privacy, and public health. *Hastings Center Report*, 50(3), 43–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.1131>
- Mbote-Kameri, P., & Kipkoeh, D. A. (2020). *Human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya*. University of Nairobi, School of Law. <https://uonscholar.uonbi.ac.ke/kenyalawscholar/blog/human-rights-implications-covid-19-pandemic-kenya>
- Manitakis, A. (2020, November 18). *I dīmósia ygeía skopós syntagmatiká prostatetevómenos* [Громадське здоров'я як конституційно захищена мета] [in Greek]. <https://www.constitutionalism.gr/2020-11-18-manitakis-ygeia-synathroiseis/> constitutionalism.gr
- Mantzoufas, P., & Pavlopoulos, A. (2020, May 2). *Koronoíós kai elefthería tis kínisis: Diatiróntas to Síntagma "zontanó" en méso pandemías* [Коронавірус і свобода пересування: зберігаючи Конституцію «живою» під час пандемії] [PDF, in Greek]. https://www.constitutionalism.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020.05.02_MantzoufasPavlopoulos_koronoioseleftheria-kinisis.pdf pergamos_website
- Raikos, A. (2011). *Syntagmatikó dikaio: Themeliódi dikaiómata* [Конституційне право: основоположні права] [in Greek]. Nomiki Vivliothiki.
- Sebhatu, A., Wennberg, K., Arora-Jonsson, S., & Lindberg, S. I. (2020). Explaining the homogeneous diffusion of COVID-19 nonpharmaceutical interventions across heterogeneous countries. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(35), 21201–21208. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2010625117>



- Sekalala, S., Forman, L., Habibi, R., & Meier, B. M. (2020). Health and human rights are inextricably linked in the COVID-19 response. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(9), e003359. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003359>
- Sharma, T., & Bashir, M. (2020). Use of apps in the COVID-19 response and the loss of privacy protection. *Nature Medicine*, 26(8), 1165–1167. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0928-y>
- Thanou-Christophilou, V. (2020). *I prostasía tis dīmósias ygeías kai i katapátisi themeliodón dikaiómaton* [Захист громадського здоров'я та порушення основоположних прав] [in Greek]. <https://www.dikastiko.gr/articles/vasiliki-thanoy-christofiloy-i-prostasia-tis-dimosias-ygeias-kai-i-katapatisi-themeliodon-dikaiomaton/>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1948, December 10). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (217 A (III)). <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> United Nations
- United Nations General Assembly. (1966, December 16). *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (2200A (XXI)). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1966, December 16). *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (993 U.N.T.S. 3). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>
- Valerio, C. (2020). Human rights and COVID-19 pandemic. *JBRA Assisted Reproduction*, 24(3), 379–381. <https://doi.org/10.5935/1518-0557.20200041>
- Vasilopoulos, P., McAvay, H., Brouard, S., & Foucault, M. (2023). Emotions, governmental trust and support for the restriction of civil liberties during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Political Research*, 62(2), 422–442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12513>
- Venizelos, E. (2020, April 4). *Pandimía, themeliódi dikaiómata kai dimokratía* [Пандемія, основоположні права та демократія] [in Greek]. <https://evenizelos.gr/mme/articlesinthepress/435-articles2020/6222-4-4-2020.html>
- Yip, C., Han, N. L. R., & Sng, B. L. (2016). Legal and ethical issues in research. *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60(9), 684–688. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5049.190627>
- Zwitter, A., & Gstrein, O. J. (2020). Big data, privacy and COVID-19—Learning from humanitarian expertise in data protection. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 5, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-020-00072-6>