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-  Critical elections: Which way for the democratic nations?
-  Struggle to vaccinate the world
-  The next epidemic or pandemic

# Informer

## 2022 Forecast



-  New focus for extremism
-  Water scarcity and famine
-  Africa: conflicts and coups
-  Pandemic driven crimes
-  Covid-19 and Africa-Europe migrant route

### 1 Extreme Weather

Many countries have seen the effects of catastrophic wildfires and floods, resulting in fatalities and damage on an unprecedented scale in recent decades. Climate change is driving extreme weather events and will exacerbate them in the future, testing the limits of emergency readiness and infrastructure. The scale of floods and wildfires as well as increasingly brutal heatwaves are expected to accelerate the already ongoing phenomenon of climate migration and render some areas permanently uninhabitable.

Meeting the disruptions caused by extreme weather will require a more ambitious plan against climate change, as well as adaptive infrastructure and boosting emergency services to withstand the effect of future natural disasters, aspects which were discussed at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow.

More than 40 countries announced plans to phase out coal power projects by 2030 in developed countries and 2040 in poorer nations. It remains to be seen if the planned investments in clean energy by these countries can help them meet their targets set for 2030 and beyond to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the coming year. At present trends, the outcome of 2.4 degrees Celsius (36.3 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming by 2100 would be an achievement.

### 2 Future of the pandemic and its impact

Despite ongoing vaccination efforts, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will persist well beyond 2021. Israel and several other countries with high vaccination coverage have seen surges in COVID-19 cases even higher than 2020 levels, showing that a complete return to pre-pandemic life without some face masking and social distancing is unlikely.

Instead, education, work and other aspects of public life will continue operating in hybrid mode. Wary of reimposing sweeping lockdowns as seen in the early stages of the pandemic, governments will rely on encouraging booster shots, distancing and restricting public life for unvaccinated individuals as mitigating measures. Hospitality and travel industries are expected to be harder hit by the uncertainties of the hybrid world.

Despite some resumption of international travel, the Airports Council International Europe (ACI Europe) forecasts that air traffic in Europe will not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2025.

Transitioning back to a pre-pandemic state will entail continuing vaccination efforts — including expanding vaccine access in developing countries — as well as combating misinformation and backlash against health measures.

### 3 Critical elections: Which way for democratic nations?

Predictions that political polarisation would taper off with the electoral losses of President Donald Trump and his Republican Party (GOP) and drawing down of COVID-19 restrictions have proven overly optimistic. Despite its losses in 2020, the GOP is even more firmly under the control of the former president and his allies, with rejection of the 2020 presidential results a litmus test.

The long-anticipated rematch between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen for the French presidency in 2022 is no longer a sure thing. Far-right polemicist Éric Zemmour is polling neck and neck with Le Pen for second place in the presidential polls. A significant resumption of public health restrictions or new Islamist terrorist attacks could cost Macron his base of support and fire up the far-wing opposition.

The polarisation of Brazilian society is likely to increase ahead of the October 2022 general election, with rival mass demonstrations likely in urban hubs across the country. Incumbent far-right President Jair Bolsonaro is facing an uphill battle for re-election. Former two-time president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 75, whose corruption conviction was annulled in November 2019 on a legal technicality, is likely to become the main opponent to Bolsonaro.

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#### 4 Struggle to vaccinate the world

Protests against COVID-19 vaccination, as well as vaccine supply and distribution issues in relatively less wealthy countries, will continue into 2022. Vaccination has proven instrumental in significantly reducing deaths and severe symptoms, as well as keeping case numbers low. However, backlash against governments' vaccination mandates has resulted in mass protests worldwide.

While some countries struggle to overcome vaccine hesitancy, others struggle to secure and deliver COVID-19 vaccines. Over 85% of people living in Africa are still waiting for their first dose, even as millions of doses ordered by wealthier countries go unused and expire. Vaccination rates will likely pick up pace as vaccine manufacturers plan to increase production and wealthier countries donate excess vaccines, but the fact that the vast majority of the population is not vaccinated against COVID-19 in some countries will mean that restrictions on travel to and from those countries will be maintained by many others in the near-term.

#### 5 The next epidemic or pandemic

The mobilisation of scientific resources by governments, regulators and pharmaceutical companies delivered safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to the world in little under a year, was an unprecedented public health triumph. This success, however, also demonstrates a number of major risks going forward into future public health crises.

The pandemic exposed serious fault lines within societies, particularly the Western democracies, as right-wing populism birthed a very vocal politics of defiance against public health measures, especially in the United States (US) and Australia.

International cooperation on infectious diseases also suffered, despite global public-private partnerships to develop vaccines. China's refusal to examine the origins of the virus have greatly dented its reputation, while the political partisanship and high loss of life in Western democracies, particularly the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), has tarnished these countries' images. Effectively managing a future pandemic will require rebuilding trust and cooperation between countries as well as between public health officials and the general public.

#### 6 New focus for extremism

In 2022, the security environment along the borders of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with Afghanistan will remain challenging and unpredictable. Central Asian governments' efforts, except for Tajikistan, to build diplomatic and intelligence-sharing relationships with the Taliban are unlikely to prevent possible cross-border attacks, the flow of suspected terrorists, or export of extremism. Despite the economic leverage these nations hold over Afghanistan's new rulers, the Taliban has proven unwilling or incapable of coordinating closely with any of its neighbours, save Pakistan, on these issues.

India faces threats from both Hindu and Islamist extremism. Violent attacks by members of right-wing Hindu groups targeting

Muslim individuals and businesses have been on the rise since the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. A similarly tense environment surrounding extremism exists in Sri Lanka where the government has been criticised for its Prevention of Terrorism Act. Counterterrorism raids and arrests have increased nationwide following a large-scale militant attack in 2019 targeting three churches.

#### 7 Water scarcity and famine

There is a 72% chance that 2022 will be a hotter year than the previous ones, according to various climate studies, as global warming continues unabated. The heat will worsen drought conditions across the Middle East and North Africa, the world's most water-insecure region, which has access to only 1.4% of the world's fresh water supplies.

The lack of water is already impacting farming, which accounts for 80% of consumption in the region, leading to food shortages in many countries. The problem is further compounded as water facilities are targeted in ongoing internal conflicts, leaving governments unable to treat and deliver water to the public. Meanwhile, Egypt and Ethiopia continue to go head to head over the construction and operation of an Ethiopian hydro-electric dam on the Nile River.

The water crisis has garnered more attention from both the public and governments in the region in recent years, but little has been done to reduce water waste, expand water treatment infrastructure or resolve conflicts.

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## 8 Africa: conflicts and coups

Several conflicts in Africa took on new dimensions in 2021 and are likely to continue unabated through 2022. In June, the separatist Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) retook Mekelle, the Tigray regional capital. Emboldened by their success, Tigrayan forces proceeded to advance into the Amhara and Afar regions.

The Sahel region also continues to be plagued by insecurity and instability, with domestic and international security forces unable to stem the violence from jihadist and other armed militant groups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. France has vowed to scale back its operations in the Sahel region in 2022, prompting Mali's military leaders to allegedly pursue a deal with the Wagner Group – a Russian mercenary company already involved in several conflicts in Africa and accused of carrying out human rights violations.

While military coups used to be the norm in Africa between 1950 and 2000, the trend of military leaders seizing power slowed in the following two decades. However, four coups occurred in 2021 alone, with new military leaders overthrowing governments in Mali, Chad, Guinea and Sudan. The African Union (AU) and the rest of the international community condemn such acts, however military leaders have acted with impunity to take power from leaders with questionable legitimacy.

The justifications for military coups, including corrupt elites, poverty and bad governance, have largely been the same for decades, and with these undemocratic practices still prevalent in many countries on the continent, more coups are likely in the years ahead.

## 9 Pandemic driven crime waves

An increase in crimes such as attacks on security personnel and kidnap-for-ransom plots are expected to continue in developing and semi-developed countries after seeing a marked rise in 2020–21 amid the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased crime rates can be linked to a number of factors that boil down to the impotence many governments exhibit in providing security and stability.

Authorities who impose draconian measures without providing adequate relief inadvertently drive people living on the margins to seek more lucrative alternatives. When compounded with the inability to exact control over the national territory, opportunistic criminal organisations thrive.

The severe impact the pandemic has had on subsistence lifestyles worldwide is profound and will continue to disproportionately affect those of lower economic status in 2022. Through 2021, theft and trafficking of goods in places like South Africa saw mass casualties amid police attempts to eradicate these clandestine operations while an unprecedented number of bandit attacks were reported in rural communities across Nigeria, many of which resulted in mass kidnappings.

Meanwhile, drug traffickers across the Americas will continue to double-down on efforts to grow their influence by any means possible with criminal groups becoming more brazen since the beginning of the pandemic. This sustained trend will likely continue in 2022 with organised criminal groups coming into increasingly deadly conflict with security forces.

## 10 COVID-19 and the Africa–Europe migrant route

The African continent has some of the lowest vaccination rates, weakest healthcare systems and most fragile local economies in the world. The impact of COVID-19 has created unsustainable living conditions for millions, particularly those who are already facing ongoing conflicts within their communities. Additionally, COVID-19 resulted in the slashing of many aid budgets, leaving many with no choice but to attempt perilous and lengthy migration routes through North Africa into Europe.

One of the most popular migration routes is through Libya. Individuals arriving from as far afield as the Horn of Africa, some 4,000km distant, arrive in Libya in the hope of reaching Europe across the Mediterranean.

For those already on migration routes, the anticipated high impact on refugee and migrant populations of disproportionate COVID-19 deaths and hospitalisations, whether in camps or en route, has not been reported.

Rather, tightened border restrictions and use of COVID-19 as a reason to reduce asylum intake in European countries has had a significantly greater impact on the migrant journey. Even after economic conditions improve, the growing tide of anti-refugee sentiment in Europe will see public health measures to limit migrant arrivals maintained.