

Covid-19 and the prospect of social unrest

History reveals that social tensions accumulated over an epidemic can lead to significant episodes of rebellion. See details [here](#).

Two Italian academics suggest that a view about the possible effects of Covid-19 on protest and future social unrest can be achieved by looking at the great plagues of the past. Analysing 57 epidemic episodes between the Black Death (1346-1353) and the Spanish Flu (1919-1920), they found that during an epidemic the status quo is generally maintained and incumbent governments tend to consolidate but that a sharp increase in social instability occurs in the aftermath of the pandemic. Focusing on five cholera epidemics, the authors count 39 rebellions in the decade preceding an epidemic and 71 rebellions in the decade following it.

‘Overall, the historical evidence shows that epidemics display a potential disarranging effect on civil society along three dimensions’, the authors write. ‘First, the policy measures tend to conflict with the interests of people, generating a dangerous friction between society and institutions. Second, the extent to which an epidemic impacts differently on society in terms of mortality and economic welfare may exacerbate inequality. Third, the psychological shock can induce irrational narratives on the causes and the spread of the disease, which may result in social or racial discrimination and even xenophobia.’

See also the Resilience First news item on the after-effects of pandemics [here](#) and an article in the latest copy of *Professional Security* magazine referenced [here](#).