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THE EAST ASIAN COVID-19 PARADOX

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The East Asian COVID-19 Paradox

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the first global public health emergency since 1918, the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, and the greatest geopolitical tensions in decades. Global governance mechanisms failed. Yet in 2020, East Asian countries (with caveats) managed to control COVID-19 better than most other countries and to increase their cooperation toward economic integration, despite their position on the security front line. What explains this East Asian COVID paradox in a region devoid of strong regional institutions? This Element argues that high levels of institutional preparation, social cohesion, and global strategic reinforcement in a context of situational convergence explain the results. It relies on high-level interviews and case studies across the region.

Keywords: COVID-19, global governance, East Asia, regionalism, RCEP, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, ASEAN

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