



SERBIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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ПОЛИТИЧКА
СРПСКА



Institute for Political Studies

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FOREWORD

This issue of the *Serbian Political Thought* journal stems from the conference “Elections – Democracy – Covid-19. Lessons from Europe”, a novel event organized by the University of Warsaw and the Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade.

The first edition of the conference was held on February 24 and 25 this year, with the focus on Covid-19 impact on electoral and general political processes in European countries. A two-day online event was attended by more than 30 participants from universities and research institutions from 14 countries.

Selected 11 papers are now published with the aim to continue the scholarly debate around the problems of pandemic’s effect on democracies of Europe, with a particular attention given to the elections held under these extraordinary conditions. Apart from that, authors have also shed a light on emerging trends surrounding party systems of several countries, including the rise of populists and success of new parties, as well as the state of democracy in hybrid regimes.

The “Elections – Democracy – Covid-19. Lessons from Europe” conference is conceived as biennial and will resume in 2024, hopefully as an offline event where scholars will be able to meet and discuss in person. We are looking forward to seeing you there.

On behalf of the Editorial Board

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THE PANDEMIC WORLD OF COVID-19 IN EUROPE: POLITOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON STATE OF EXCEPTION IN SELECTED COUNTRIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL POLICY MODELS

Abstract

The state of exception is implemented to protect the security of citizens and public order. During that time the human rights become limited in favor of public authorities. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, only some countries in Europe have declared a state of exception. It is worth to consider what caused this decision. The aim of this article is therefore to determine whether and to what extent a specific model of social policy dominating in the state had an impact on the steps taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and above all whether it determined the implementation of a state of exception. The concept created and developed by many researchers, among the others Bogusław Jagusiak became the background for the considerations. He classified and defined the existing forms of social policy, putting them in the framework of models. The starting point for this research was the typology proposed by Gøst Esping-Andersen. This concept has been developed and the following models have been distinguished: Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Continental, Mediterranean and Post-Communist. According to the above distinction, five countries that that represent a

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specific model of social policy to the greatest extent will be selected. For the Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Continental, Mediterranean and Post-Communist models, these will be Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Poland. Then they will be subjected to comparative studies in relation to the issues described above.

Keywords: Covid-19, state of emergency, social policy models, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Covid-19 is a time full of specific challenges that most of the world's governments had to face instantly. Some of them took the measures that had been available in the constitutions of those countries by declaring state of emergency, whereas the others announced restrictions based only on state of epidemic. Different models of social policy were applied among those countries, including these where dominate Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, Continental, Mediterranean or Post-Communist models.

An interesting research question is how does the dominating model of social policy influence the anti-pandemic measures, and does it cause the declaration of a state of emergency? Such states are usually declared in case of great danger. State of emergency is one of the options of extraordinary laws that are announced to ensure safety of citizens of the state, protect state's regime and maintain social order. During the state of emergency the proportions between laws of individuals and state powers change in favor of the second ones. Not all of the governments declared state of emergency due to COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them decided to announce the state of epidemic which is system implemented locally as a remedy for the risk of spreading epidemic. It is obvious that with such extraordinary legal regime goes the limitation of individual rights. Such phenomenon may be called as *crawling authoritarianism* (Norris 2021).

The theoretical model on which the analysis in this article will be based is the concept that appears very often in the literature on the subject and was quoted, among others, by Bogusław Jagusiak, who defined and classified the forms of social policy, putting them in the framework of models (Jagusiak 2015). It is important to note that the inspiration for this classification was the tripartite typology of social policy models proposed by the Danish sociologist Gøst Esping-Andersen (1990, 26-29). Jagusiak extended this concept by distinguishing five basic models: Continental,

Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Mediterranean and Post-communist. According to the above, the analysis will cover five countries that represent a specific model of social policy to the greatest extent. For Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Continental, Mediterranean and Post-Communist models, these will be Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Poland respectively. Two research methods were used for the analysis: comparative and case study.

EXTENDED TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL POLICY MODELS

Scandinavian model: Sweden

Sweden is the main representative of the countries belonging to the social democratic welfare state. The Swedish model can be described in a few points. First and foremost, it is characterized by an extensive social safety based on free education and health care, financed by taxes, ease of doing business, high level of democracy, free trade combined with collective risk-sharing, low market regulation, low levels of corruption, partnership between employers, trade unions and government where social partners negotiate between themselves the conditions of the workplaces (Andersen et al. 2007).

The philosophy and values of the Swedish model are based on maintaining equality and universal access to social services. Women do not give up motherhood and still participate in labor market. The Swedish family policy implements the model of combining work and family responsibilities, addressed to both partners (dual earner). Sweden's fertility rate is one of the highest in Europe (Golinowska 2018).

Sweden and other countries with the Nordic model of social policy are among the countries that are placed very high in the Ranking of Happiness. According to the data for 2016-2018, Sweden came seventh, followed by Switzerland, The Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, and Finland only, so again mostly Scandinavian-based countries with a solid welfare system, promoting equality (Conley 2022).

However, the Scandinavian model is very often criticized. There are some weaknesses, which allow both citizens and institutions to make use of the system contrary to its objectives. Manifestations of this are frauds, the development of the black market on the one hand, and the growing social tolerance for these phenomena on the other. It is also believed that the social security system, transfer payments on the one hand, and taxes on the other, contribute to the deepening of difficulties on the labor market and to an increase of unemployment. Income security has

raised expectations for amount of wages level and reduced the propensity to work. *Welfare state* was such a catchy slogan and a policy based on it very popular and attractive to many countries. Now this model experiences serious difficulties and is therefore increasingly questioned. The welfare state is believed to be the source of ineffective bureaucracy in economic life, limiting the freedom of enterprises and individuals (Mitręga 1996, 128-130).

Anglo-Saxon model: Great Britain

This system is dominated by socio-political traditions derived from the Poor Act (that highlighted the distinction between worthy and unworthy recipients of social benefits) and the Beveridge Report (it contained the rules that put focus on a high employment combined with very low contributions and minimal basic security for society as a whole) (Kraus and Geisen 2005, 81).

In Great Britain, the social policy model is based on a flat-rate income security, accompanied by an underdeveloped legal system. There is central financing of benefits and only the most deprived persons are entitled to receive government support. System is based on market mechanisms. There is a focus on encouraging private companies to provide social services. Employment protection is not high (Golinowska 2018). The labor market can be described as flexible, and the dominant principle is *easy to hire and fire*. It should be emphasized that in Great Britain non-wage labor costs are relatively low and unemployment benefits are relatively average. Trade unions do not play a significant role (Tendera-Właszczuk 2009, 132).

The school system in Great Britain was and still is an exemplary model for many countries in the world, including the socialist countries. What should draw the attention of all reformers, however, are the resources directed to him; both intellectual, human resources and financial outlays. In Great Britain there are a lot of funds spent on schools not only by public entities but also by and households (Golinowska 2018).

Continental model: Germany

Germany is seen as an example of a welfare state. Its roots are connected with the policy pursued by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. He was the initiator of the introduction of the first social rights, which, although they already appeared in medieval Germany, only in his times were covered by most professional groups (Baran 2012, 199-201).

The German model of social policy is characterized by the fact that the welfare state is a kind of social contract made between the government and citizens, based on the assumption that the state provides assistance, which citizens not only accept, but also expect, and thus the majority services and benefits is in the nature of entitlements. There is also a strong relationship between social rights and the status of employment - in principle, the possibility of using basic social benefits is closely related to participation in the labor market, which is tantamount to the need to have the status of an employee, for people who do not have it, support is optional. Labor costs are relatively high and to a large extent result from high retirement and pension benefits (Baran 2012, 199-201).

In German education, attention is still being paid to linking education with the labor market. In vocational education, the model of dual education is used, in which learning is conducted simultaneously with practical classes in workplaces. This helps to prepare students for work and helps enterprises to maintain a good organizational and competence level of employees (Golinowska 2018, 70).

Mediterranean model: Italy

The Italian welfare state has not developed a typical welfare system. Its local structures are poor and operate on modest benefits. The family continues to hold a strong position in the Italian social safety. However, it turned out that even a culturally strong family like the Italian one is in fact weak without adequate public support. Despite the relatively low participation of women in the labor market, fewer and fewer children are born (Italy has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe) and care services are obtained in the *gray area*. The Italian labor market is largely powered by immigrants. This country has turned from a traditional emigration country to a host country. As a result, there is greater consent for a more flexible labor market to develop, especially for the younger generation. Good health status indicators are achieved with less public effort due to the beneficial effects of the Mediterranean diet and warm climate, as well as a lifestyle that is freer than, for example, in the countries of Northern Europe. At the same time, as a result of the deepening disproportion in the demographic structure resulting from low fertility, the promotion of health for the elderly has been more clearly present on the political agenda for several years as a method of reducing financial burdens in health care (Golinowska 2018, 80-81).

Post-communist model: Poland

It is very difficult to classify Central and Eastern European countries into the models of social policy discussed above. This is due to the fact that for several decades the social and economic system was totally different from those that dominated in Western Europe. For this reason, it cannot be related to the classic welfare state. Therefore, in the scientific literature, a post-communist (also often called post-socialist) model of social policy has been distinguished.

In Polish Post-communist model of economy a poor ability to generate a high employment rate and a high level of average wages appears (Książopolski 2011, 29). Poland is one of the countries where the strategy aimed at the development of labor resources, human capital and the creation of job places did not have the proper priority. The review of goals and actions taken as a part of labor market reforms in other countries and in the EU recommendations (primarily as part of the employment strategy) clearly shows that some actions in Poland were “against the flow” of the mainstream postulates. Here are some of them:

- Failure to undertake a program of reconciling work and family responsibilities,
- Applying relatively generous social protection to people who leave the labor market permanently: the disabled and people laid off in the pre-retirement age - stimulating these groups to be passive,
- Lack of real promotion and support for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs,
- No promotion of the principle that work is always more profitable than using social benefits, both by employers and the state,
- Acceptance of emigration as a way to alleviate the imbalance in the labor market, despite the loss of human capital (Golinowska 2018, 116-117).

In Poland, there are still a wide scale of the *gray area* of employment. Despite various ways on the part of the state to include this area of activity in the formal labor market, there are many factors supporting this phenomenon. This applies to both very poor people with low employability (limited social ties, lack of qualifications and health disorders) as well as people with high qualifications, usually free professions, who carry out some of their assignments informally (Książopolski 2011, 30).

STATE OF EMERGENCY IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

Many states have envisaged emergency situations in their constitutions in which standard governance is not possible. They differ in the gradability of the severity of these states. Since states of emergency interfere with issues as crucial as individual rights, their principles are usually enshrined in constitutions. They are introduced only for a certain period of time. This is to reduce the temptation of the rulers to abuse power.

There are no regulations regarding the state of emergency or a state of natural disaster in the Swedish Constitution. The only codified mechanism is that the Riksdag can be convened in the event of war (Konstytucja Szwecji 1991, 41-45).

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in turn, is a state that has not based its system on a constitution in the formal and legal sense, i.e. on regulations of the highest legal force, adopted in a specific manner and codified in the constitution. Hence, there is no mention of a state of emergency here (Khakee 2009, 26).

Italy is among the countries with an average level of codification of states of emergency. The constitution does not contain any declarations regarding the possibility of declaring martial law or extraordinary conditions. The only passages in this Act refer to who is responsible for declaring a state of war (Konstytucja Republiki Włoskiej 1947).

Germany is one of the countries with a high level of codification of the states of emergency. At the federal and provincial level, as many as six types of states of emergency are envisaged: 1) defense, 2) tensions, 3) threats to freedom and democracy, 4) extraordinary measures to restore order or public safety; 5) state of threat to the overall economic balance, 6) state of natural disaster. Perhaps it is related to the fact that Germany experienced authoritarianism very much in the 21st century, hence such detailed regulations at the constitutional level (Walecka and Wojtas 2021, 2-3).

Among the surveyed countries, Poland is also the country with the highest level of codification of states of emergency (Chapter XI of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997). There are three kinds of such states: martial law - introduced in the event of an external threat, state exceptional - introduced in the event of an internal threat and a state of natural disaster - introduced in the event of an emergency caused by the actions of the forces of nature (Prokop 2022).

COVID-19 FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL POLICY MODELS: COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Sweden

Sweden did not introduce a state of emergency because such a possibility does not arise from the country's constitution. Moreover, no specific restrictions have even been introduced. When in March 2020 many countries in Europe, including Denmark and Norway, decided to lockdown, Sweden issued recommendations to care for hygiene, avoid social contact and limit movement. Educational establishments have not been closed. According to research conducted by the Institute of Global Health Innovation, Sweden is one of the last places in the Stringency Index Range, which informs about the strictness of the restrictions introduced in individual countries. In Italy or Spain, this index was 95, while in Sweden only 52 (Institute of Global Health Innovation 2021, 4).

The lack of decisive action to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden may seem surprising, given the country's social policy model and the high level of interventionism. Here it is worth referring to the example of Denmark, where a similar model is also in force. The country adopted a different public health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Denmark closed its borders and schools very early. According to statistics, the Danish levels of trust in the government and the ability of the health authorities to lead the country through the COVID-19 crisis were significantly higher than Swedish ones. The actions of Danish government were accepted by 70% of the citizens while only 57% of Swedes were enthusiastic of what their government was doing (Hassing Nielsen and Lindvall 2021).

Great Britain

The basic act determining the scope of civil rights during the COVID-19 pandemic in England was the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020. This regulation was issued on March 26, 2020, and entered into force on the same day. Similar regulations have been adopted for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The history of these regulations, although relatively short, is nevertheless complicated - they have been amended and replaced many times. In the United Kingdom, as in other countries around the world, there has been an interference of authorities with civil rights. This mainly referred to the

restrictions on movement. During the state of emergency, citizens were obliged to stay at home and leave their place of residence only in specified circumstances. The organization of collective events or gatherings in public was also banned, and businesses and premises, including schools were closed (Moulin-Stožek 2021).

In Great Britain, as in other countries, interference with civil rights sometimes took place without a clear legal basis. For example, according to the parliamentary report on the COVID-19 pandemic, there were cases where law enforcement agencies without a legal basis made allegations of violating the principle of social distancing in England, despite the fact that such requirement was not introduced in England, but was only introduced in Wales (UK Parliament 2022).

It must be said that the UK government's policy to counter the pandemic was unstable from the beginning. The initial reluctance to introduce any restrictions put Great Britain among the countries with a high level of infected citizens. After the introduction of the restrictions, it turned out that they were unclear even to law enforcement agencies and frequently changed, which violated the principle of legal certainty and security, as well as the trust of citizens in the government (UK Parliament 2022). Doubts as to the legitimacy of the introduced restrictions and their effectiveness are expressed by the society, for example, through the constant loss of trust in Boris Johnson's office. Currently it equals 33%, in December there was a decrease of trust to government by three percentage points (Bartkiewicz 2022).

Germany

In Germany the state of emergency was not introduced in the whole country, and the basic act on which the federal level was based was the Infektionsschutzgesetzes. Germany is a federal state, however, individual federal states were also decisive in terms of possible restrictions on social and economic functioning. The only state in which a state of disaster was declared was Bavaria and the city of Halle in Saxony-Anhalt. Common to all federal states were restrictions on quarantine, ban on trade, ban on organizing meetings, and restricting the possibility of religious practice (Syryt 2021). According to research conducted by the Institute of Global Health Innovation, in the Stringency Index Range, which informs about the severity of the restrictions introduced in individual countries, Germany was ranked 81. This means that the restrictions were stricter there than, for example, in Great Britain (71) or Sweden (52), but greater than in Italy or Spain (95) (Institute of Global Health Innovation 2021, 4).

Restrictions on rights and freedom during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany, while based on formal grounds, were also widely discussed as to their compliance with the law. However, all complaints submitted to the institutions were rejected. This was due to a very precisely defined legal order, which the authorities had done before the outbreak of the pandemic. In this way, the decisions made by the authorities did not leave much room for discussion. However, attention was drawn to a similar mechanism of issuing decisions that took place, for example, in Poland – decisions were made through issuing executive acts to acts and regulations. This manner of acting of public authorities does not build the individual's trust in the state. Frequent changes to the law violate the principle of legal certainty and security (Institute of Global Health Innovation 2021, 4).

In Germany, only 27% of the society was against the introduction of restrictions on the social and economic functioning of the country. At the same time, 66% of the society expressed confidence in the actions taken by the government. Compared to other countries, this is a positive result and means that German society expresses its confidence in the existing legal order even in crisis situations.

Italy

As mentioned in the previous section, the Italian Constitution does not contain indications regarding possible states of emergency. All decisions made regarding restrictions on civil liberties in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented by means of decrees. Italy immediately introduced a lockdown, limited sporting events and closed borders. There were also significant restrictions on visits to prisons, which sparked riots in many prisons across the country (Reuters 2020).

The restrictions introduced in Italy limited civil liberties to a very high degree compared to the other countries. As mentioned, according to the research of the Institute of Global Health Innovation, the introduced restrictions were assigned a rank of 95, while in Sweden 52 (Institute of Global Health Innovation 2021).

For a long time, the public has expressed concern about the far-reaching restriction of civil rights in Italy by Prime Minister Mario Draghi. At the end of 2021, even a conference was held in Palermo. It was called *From democracy to dictatorship, the role of memory*, which aimed to draw attention to the above-mentioned problem. Participants in the debate compared the COVID-19 regulations in Italy to the oppressive policies of totalitarian states in the 1930s. The outrage centers on Draghi's

vaccination laws. They are one of the strictest in Europe. All employees in Italy must have a digital health passport confirming vaccination or a negative test result every two days. This means enormous costs, in the order of one tenth of the average salary. Citizens who refuse vaccinations and tests are suspended from work without pay (Słomski 2022).

Constitutionalists express concern about the practice of ruling by decrees and the practice of silencing the dissenting views. Mario Draghi makes his own decisions from the very beginning. It does not even consult the parties when determining the composition of its government, choosing ministers with the consent of the president. While the official state of emergency, which was declared by the government on January 31, 2020, cannot be extended beyond two years, the government is already signaling that it intends to extend it, which would likely mean the declaration of a new, different state of emergency (Słomski 2022).

How is the society reacting to the situation related to the restriction of civil liberties? Just over half of the population (55%) support the measures the government is using to fight the pandemic. At the same time, Italians are a nation that is more prone to limitations in functioning than other European countries (European Parliament 2020). Only 17% are against restricting civil liberties. The least accepted remedy, according to Italians, is a surveillance application to help fight the pandemic. For 40% of respondents claim that it restricts freedom too much (Kriesi 2020). Thus, it can be concluded that despite the voices that appear in the media about the excessive limitation of civil liberties and the abuse of his position by Prime Minister Mario Draghi, the society at least partially accepts this state of affairs and even supports it.

Poland

The pandemic resulted in many restrictions and changes in the functioning of the judiciary. In the case of Poland, it emphasized many of the problems that existed before the pandemic. These include canceled hearings, which will probably result in an extension of the duration of court proceedings in the future, the lack of information on how to contact the courts in the time of a pandemic, which undoubtedly hindered citizens' access to court, limiting the openness of external court proceedings (both in common and administrative courts), which made it impossible or significantly hindered social control over the administration of justice. The effects of these phenomena will probably be felt in the future, especially in case of the rights and freedoms of specific people. One of the group of people particularly affected by the period of the pandemic

and the introduction of restrictions, were residents of nursing homes. There are 80,000 of them in Poland. They were almost completely cut off from the world. Also, the support provided to nursing homes by the public authorities was not sufficient. The key change in access to education, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, was the implementation of the education process using distance learning methods and techniques (Dz. U. z 2020).

Under no circumstances can a pandemic situation constitute an excuse for the government to limit civil rights and freedoms. However, in Poland at that time, various types of activities that threatened the broadly defined freedom of expression could be observed, for example: prohibition of informing about the situation in the health service (employees deciding to disclose such information were severely affected, including dismissals,). Also, the government, referring to the current epidemiological situation, committed disproportionate and unjustified restrictions on the constitutional freedom to obtain information, introducing solutions that led to the discriminatory treatment of some people was not avoided, which significantly increased the risk of worsening of the situation of people who are exposed to discrimination, marginalization and exclusion.

It is also noticed that the COVID-19 epidemic particularly affected persons deprived of their liberty (pre-trial detention centers, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, correctional facilities, nursing homes), and restrictions implemented aimed at reducing the prison population were by no means uncommon. At the same time, the greatest concern is the statistics on pre-trial detention, which as the most severe preventive measure was used even more often than before the pandemic, reaching the estimated peak in September 2020 (9,466 people temporarily detained in September against 8,535 in January 2020) (Dz. U. z 2020). In the context of the deliberations, the restrictions introduced by the Government of the Republic of Poland regarding the freedom of economic activity during the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly important. The first restrictions on the activities of entrepreneurs, which, incidentally, violate the essence of the freedom of economic activity appeared as early as March 2020. The Council of Ministers went beyond the powers granted in the statutory authorization (Dz.U.poz.566 2020).

It is worth noting that some restrictions on economic freedom, related to the current pandemic situation, with respect to some enterprises in Poland have taken the form of a complete ban on activities, e.g. conducting activities aimed at improving physical condition, running swimming pools, water parks, etc. hotel and restaurant industry or other

industries with broadly understood tourism (Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka 2021). By introducing restrictions on economic freedom, numerous legal irregularities were committed - starting from the use of a legal act of an inappropriate rank for this purpose, through the enactment of a statutory authorization that does not meet constitutional requirements, and the Council of Ministers exceeding the powers conferred by the said authorization, to the violation of the essence of freedom by some regulations.

The fact that the Council of Ministers did not introduce a state of a natural disaster should be assessed negatively, as it considered the necessary measures to be taken, which, as a last resort, took place anyway. Such a decision raises serious suspicions that it could have been caused by the intention to restrict citizens from pursuing claims for damages against the state (Pecyna 2020, 35). One of the reasons may also be the presidential elections in Poland, which are to be held in the election calendar. It should be emphasized that the public authority in Poland, fully consciously, despite the existing threats, resigned from the legal instruments appropriate to the states of emergency described in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Trociuk 2021, 11), and yet, as already mentioned, the state of epidemic announced in the country as a threat to the proper functioning of the society in fully corresponds to the natural disaster described in Article 232 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Florczak-Wątor 2020, 20).

In Poland, the pandemic was simultaneous to the crisis of the rule of law that had lasted for over 5 years and intensified its symptoms. As in previous years, there are cases of violations of the Constitution, as well as many activities that have adapted the law to the political will. As a result of the crisis of the rule of law, the control exercised by the Constitutional Tribunal became completely ineffective, and the Constitutional Tribunal itself remained a tool in the hands of the rulers (Kalisz, Szulecka and Wolny 2021).

A large part of the provisions adopted under the so-called anti-crisis shields was processed at an accelerated pace and without proper public consultations. In some cases, the adoption of regulatory data was used to change the provisions not related to counteracting the pandemic, e.g. part of the Election Code was changed in this way. The lack of a declaration of a natural disaster also affected important democratic processes, such as the presidential elections in Poland in 2020 - the set date was the result of a political agreement. The deepening crisis of the rule of law in Poland is evidenced by changes in the law, which deepened the existing threat to the independence of judges. Authorities whose

independence is essential for the functioning of the entire judiciary are becoming more and more dependent on political will (Kalisz, Szulecka and Wolny 2021).

Failure to declare a state of a natural disaster in Poland results in the fact that restrictions on the rights of an individual necessary to combat the COVID-19 pandemic are possible only if the requirements under Article 31 (3) of the Polish Constitution are met. Otherwise, the introduced legal regulations in the field of limitations of the freedoms and rights of an individual should be considered unconstitutional (Węgrzyn 2021, 157). It should be emphasized that no provision of the Act on Combating Infectious Diseases authorizes the Minister of Health, or any other minister or even the Council of Ministers, to introduce restrictions that limit fundamental rights, such as human rights (Olszówka and Dyda 2020, 453).

All actions taken by the government during the pandemic crisis were reflected in the statistics on the satisfaction of the society with the actions taken by the government. According to a Kantar survey conducted at the end of April 2020, 40% of Poles expressed satisfaction with the measures taken by the authorities to fight COVID-19. However, compared to other countries, this does not seem to be a high percentage. For comparison: in Italy 55% of the population was satisfied, in Germany 66%, and in Sweden 67% (European Parliament 2020, 44). However, it is not known how the statistics would develop, given the strong resistance of the society to possible restrictions on civil liberties. As many as 47% of the society was against taking such measures (European Parliament 2020, 77). It is not known, however, whether the respondents referred to the restrictions, which took place at that time, or whether they were completely against any bans, even taking into account the state of emergency provided for by the Constitution.

SUMMARY

To sum up the analysis results, the dominant model in each state has no impact on the actions taken by the authorities in order to prevent from the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. There is no clear connection between the social and economic rules on which system is based on and approach to such extraordinary situation. The cases of Sweden and Denmark show that despite the same social policy model, the anti-pandemic procedures were completely different. It seems that Sweden as a country that represents Scandinavian model of social policy, where citizen is in the center of care from the government side should act more

strictly in relation to the pandemic limitations. It turned out that it was not the case. Totally different approach was taken by Norway, where limitations were implemented. On the other hand in case of Spain and Italy that represent Mediterranean model many similarities have been found.

Actions taken by the governments regarding pandemic were even independent on the fact if state of emergency has been mentioned in the constitution. In many states there was such regulation, but they did not take the opportunity to implement it. In some there were nothing about state of emergency in constitution, but many of limitations and even state of emergency were implemented by additional laws.

We should look for the source of government decisions first and foremost in political reasons that were different in all states.

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HYBRID ELECTION MANAGEMENT METHODS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

Abstract

This paper is based on qualitative secondary data analysis to provide more comprehensive insights into innovative electoral policy choices of election management bodies (EMBs), faced with multiple challenges of COVID-19 to different aspects of organisation of electoral cycle: its regulatory, operational, and procedural framework to ensure safe voting environment, voter participation and democratic legitimacy. Various COVID-19 related arrangements are reviewed: health safety measures and more extensive use of already existing special voting arrangements (SVAs) – early, postal, mobile or proxy voting and possibilities for online voting in the future. Strengths and weaknesses, costs and benefits of these hybrid voting methods are compared. Conclusion of this analysis is that the traditional preference of EMBs for in-person, in-polling station voting with low-tech paper ballots remains unchanged by COVID-19. There was not enough time, resources and political incentive of decision-makers to introduce innovative or high-tech online SVAs. Analysis shows that postponement of elections during pandemic challenges institutional stability and should not be regarded as an example of future good practice. Decreased or inadequately high voter turnout during COVID-19 was registered as a significant threat to democratic legitimacy and to resilience of democracy. Necessity for strategic contingency planning of electoral cycle is confirmed and recommended.

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Keywords: electoral cycle, election risk management, COVID-19, special voting arrangements (SVAs), hybrid voting, voter turnout

INTRODUCTION – RESEARCH METHOD AND QUESTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic is a ‘health nightmare’ but also a scientific dream, since it has prompted scientists from across the world to collaborate with joint noble aim to find treatments and a vaccine to stop the spread of global contagion. In the realm of political sciences, we could observe that the COVID-19 pandemic is a ‘political nightmare’ but also an ideal opportunity for many populist and authoritarian rulers to seize even more power and to endanger further democracy and freedom of citizens. During the pandemic, we are likely to see further erosion of fundamental institutions of representative democracy – parliaments, political parties, elections are becoming more vulnerable than before for new types of misuse, or disregard. Politicians, decision makers, and election management bodies (EMBs) were faced with multiple challenges of the COVID-19 crisis – they were expected to provide swiftly, innovative electoral policy choices to ensure safe voting environment for citizens – voters, as well as democratic and legitimate outcome of the elections.

For the purpose of this analysis, elections are perceived as massive social event that mobilize and unite millions of people in a joint ritual through which voters, in ‘possession’ of sovereign power of their individual vote, determine who should represent them in legislative or executive branch of government. As Orr notes, elections are rituals that has a specific rhythm: “a dimension of a grand ritual, a recurrent public occasion marking the passage and renewal of political seasons. It is an extended ritual run according to established timetables and made up of a myriad of ritualized processes” (Orr 2015).

In this sense, elections could be defined as continuous process of ritualized re-production of authority. Through these rituals of voting, ‘the voice’ and the ‘will of the people’ perform an act which Bourdieu, in his essay “Rites of Institution”, describes as a form of ‘social magic’ which has transformative power to change the public order – the power relations between individuals and authorities (Bourdieu 1991, 26). That is why we should explore changes in political culture of election rituals – the COVID-19 pandemic made us revisit the patterns of acculturation to new modes of exercising of citizenship rights and freedoms (Vukomanovic 2020).

Still, approach of this paper is not focused on the analysis of the predominant competitive models of elections. We want to explore experimental dimension of elections, in a social space not regulated by laws, but by emergency – i.e. by the COVID-19 pandemic which dictate new patterns and modes of electoral behavior. Focus of further analysis is to explore how voter experience of elections is changing, and how elections are re-defined as live events in emergency context, irrespective of the political results of voting. To do this, we are having in mind the electoral cycle model, developed by The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network project¹ that comprehends elections as continuous set of steps and processes involved in the conduct of elections, which is divided in three main periods:

1. the pre-electoral period (planning, training, information, and voter registration);
2. the electoral period (nominations, campaigns, voting, and results);
3. the post-electoral period (review, reform, and strategies).

Decision makers had to assess and identify which exact dimensions of the electoral cycle could be disrupted and find-out sustainable solutions to these threats. It was reasonable to expect that the greatest challenge for risk management will occur during electoral period, not in pre or post electoral period of electoral cycle. Landman and Splendore (2020) pointed out that the highest likelihood and highest impact on overall elections will have risks of electoral disruption during second phase of electoral cycle: nomination, campaign, voting, vote counts and processing of results of election.

Having in mind this electoral cycle, further analysis should provide comprehensive review and mapping of risk matrix of elections – what new challenges, threats, risks and costs were emerging in the process of organizing and conducting of elections in new extraordinary environment caused by COVID-19? What policy choices have been made to ensure safe environment for elections – what risk mitigating measures have been implemented during elections to prevent negative threats to public health? Furthermore, analysis should provide insight into the hybrid mixture of traditional in-person, in-polling station voting protocols with already existing, or possibly newly designed special voting arrangements (SVAs). Finally, analysis should provide also reliable indicator on the level of democratic legitimacy of elections during COVID-19 – based on in/adequately low/high voter turnout.

¹ The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network Project [online] <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/electoral-assistance/electoral-cycle> [12/03/2022].

To provide answers to the above-mentioned research questions this paper is based on qualitative secondary data analysis to deliver more comprehensive answers and in-depth insights. Firstly, a review of reliable analytical literature – empirical/case studies was conducted to get a detailed understanding on how elections have been managed during COVID-19. In addition to that, a review of inter/national documentation and data-bases on elections conducted since the outbreak of the pandemic, in comparative perspective in Europe and worldwide, was undertaken. Finally, the main trends in public policy choices and future strategic planning related to reforms of voting methods in emergency environment were scanned.

RISK MANAGEMENT OF ELECTIONS AND “POSTPONEMENT PARADOX”

The spread of COVID-19 was an external threat, a contingency that was not intentionally produced by human, i.e. political actors. Nevertheless, politicians had to organize elections and implement risk management of emerging crisis. To do that, they had to construct a risk matrix in order to assess and address the impact of this contagious disease to elections.

In any crisis situation, question ‘who is in charge?’ is the key question to be resolved first. It is evident that the landscape of stakeholders in charge of election management was extended during COVID-19, since not only EMBs, but also medical experts who were making assessments of health risks were also becoming ‘in charge’. In Serbia, for example, in March 2020, the Government formed the Crisis Headquarters for the Suppression of Infectious Diseases COVID-19 (CHQ). The President of the Serbian Government, and the Minister of health have been appointed, among others, as the co-leaders of the Crisis HQ. Members of this body were also directors of relevant health institutes and clinics, and representatives of other relevant bodies. This *ad hoc* body was the most prominent and very influential public health authority in charge of blueprinting official, legally binding recommendations to mitigate the risk of coronavirus transmission. The fact is that every country has similar task force body – the most well-known is, of course, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

These various national, public health oriented ‘task force’ expert bodies, together with incumbent politicians had very strong, if not decisive influence on EMBs. A group of authors support that competent public health professional should couple their expertise with the technical

knowledge of electoral authorities to develop adequate safety protocols for conducting of elections, and take a firm stand against actors who push for decisions that can put voters and poll workers at risk to advance their political interests (Birch *et al.* 2020, 4). But these authors are also warning on the problem of politicization – “perception of political dependence and reputational issue” between prominent government figures, members of public health task force bodies, and EMBs (Birch *et al.* 17). Time will show if this *ad hoc* alliance between politicians and ‘white coats’ – medical experts will produce increasing incentives for misuse of political power and expert authority, especially during future health emergencies.

Election management bodies (EMBs) in charge of organizing of elections responded to COVID-19 crisis in different ways, which might be classified to vary between traffic light ‘stop – wait – go’ options of policy choices:

1. moving forward with elections with no changes to procedures;
2. moving forward with elections and implementing some measures to mitigate risks to voters and poll workers;
3. postponing elections, as Burić and Darnoff observed (2020).

According to the Global overview of the impact of COVID-19 on elections, developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA 2022), from February 21, 2020 until December 31, 2021, at least 153 countries and territories have decided to hold national or subnational elections despite concerns related to COVID-19 (out of which at least 127 have held national elections or referendums). But at least 80 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone national and subnational elections (out of which at least 42 countries and territories have decided to postpone national elections and referendums). Finally, at least 63 countries and territories have held elections that were initially postponed, out of which at least 31 have held national elections or referendums.²

When comparing on a global level, it seems that governments – i.e. EMBs in Europe were the most cautious, i.e. more reluctant to hold initially scheduled elections, in comparison to decision makers in other parts of the world: out of total number of postponed national or sub-national electoral events, the greatest percentage of delays occurred in Europe – 32.5% of all postponements. In Asia Pacific region 22.5% elections of the total number were made, and the same percentage was recorded in North and Latin America – 22.5%. Politicians in Africa were

2 This list is composed according to reports made by governments, electoral management bodies, and news media. The IDEA notes that this list is not comprehensive but represents a snapshot of decisions and events across the globe.

less keen to postpone elections – 18.8% of overall cases of postponed elections were on this continent. The remaining percentage of globally postponed elections - 3.7% occurred in Middle East (International IDEA 2022).

More detailed list of 23 European countries that were postponing national or subnational – municipal or local elections and referendums, shows that these elections were not canceled for a lengthy period. Mostly, they were postponed for a time span of several months – from 1-7 months. Most cautious were decision makers in the UK – a series of local elections scheduled for May 2020 were moved to be held in May 2021. In Germany, local elections in Hessen, scheduled for April 2020 were moved to March 2021 (International IDEA 2022). It should be noted one unique case – that voters in Croatia even went to the polls ahead of time, although critics argued that the ruling party – government has pushed for early elections, in July 2020, in order to capitalize electoral victory on its competent management of the coronavirus epidemic – and, according to the final results of the elections, they were right (Čepo *et al.* 2020).

Croatian case is evidence that incumbent politicians were still advocating to preserve ‘business as usual’ approach regarding the question of whether or not to hold elections – since they are calculating that their hardline approach during pandemic will result in increased support of voters for them. As James and Alihodzic illustrate, there are both *pros* and *cons* for postponing of elections, and they call this situation as “postponement paradox”, since the postponement might “break institutional certainty, which could pose threats of democratic breakdown—especially in presidential systems.” These authors are warning that this may lead to situations of statecraft and partisan squabbling which could trigger democratic breakdown and trust in the system (James and Alihodzic 2020, 1). Long time ago, James Madison, the architect of the U.S. Constitution, wrote: “where annual elections end, tyranny begins.”

Working Group of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies finds out that democratic and hybrid regimes were more likely to postpone their elections than authoritarian regimes. This can partially be explained by the fact that democracies wanted to ensure the legitimacy of their elections through sufficient voter turnout and the ability of the opposition to conduct electoral campaigns. On the other hand, for incumbents with authoritarian tendencies, holding elections during the pandemic “provided an opportunity to sideline and silence political opponents, civil society, critical media, and human rights advocates” (Club de Madrid and IDEA *n.d.*, 5).

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

The key question for political decision makers was how to ensure sufficient and credible levels of voter participation amid the pandemic that would manage to guarantee the inclusion, representativeness, and democratic legitimacy of elections. Electoral management bodies (EMBs) were charged with the task to provide a safe voting environment for both voters and poll workers, and to maintain inclusivity for the most vulnerable groups in populations.³

South Korea laid the blueprint for holding an election during a pandemic. South Korean precedent was an example, as Spinelli puts it: of “extraordinary measures for extraordinary circumstances” (Spinelli 2020, 2). South Korea was not under a national lockdown, and decision was made to hold elections on April 15, 2020. A detailed set of precautionary measures was made to enable voters to participate in the election with minimal safety concerns. Procedures for early voting in South Korea, as well as many risk mitigation measures provided conditions in which the turnout reached 66% in 2020 of approx. 44 million eligible voters. It was the highest turnout in the last three decades, since 1992 (in 2016 it was 58%). The turnout of early voting in 2020 hit almost 27% (12% in 2016). Conclusion can be made that a mixed voting modes – combination of early and in-person methods of voting ensured by COVID-19 risk mitigation measures led to higher turnout.

A special “Code of Conduct of Voters” was implemented due to COVID-19 which provided detailed instructions and outlined actions, safeguards and precautions that voters were required to follow through each step of the voting process. “Code of Conduct for Voters” included:

- wearing of face masks when queuing to vote, keeping a safety one meter distance, with signs and marks placed throughout the voting premises;
- temperature checking (with non-contact thermometers, 37.5 degrees Celsius max. limit);⁴
- sanitizing hands and wearing plastic gloves, while keeping IDs ready for inspection;
- temporarily lowering or removing mask to facilitate voters’

3 Important considerations for decision-makers and EMBs were highlighted in International IDEA’s 2020 Policy Brief “Managing Elections During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for Decision-Makers.

4 Those showing a temperature higher than 37.5 degrees Celsius, or displaying respiratory problems, were redirected to special polling stations with even higher degrees of protection.

identification;

- receiving, handling, and casting ballots;
- when leaving the polling station, voters had to discard their gloves into a disposal box, at the exit (Spinelli 2020, 3).

Safety measures similar to those for voters were also applied for police officers, media representatives and election observes. Korean`s National Election Commission (NEC) confirmed that the adopted extraordinary measures required an additional force of 20.000 poll workers to be deployed. The NEC exerted significant efforts to disseminate, as widely as possible, the “Code of Conduct” and to reach the electorate. The NEC broadcasting channel – eTV was established, and frequent voting information advertisements were running frequently on national television, and affixing posters and banners were around the country. Livestreaming of election day was also made available (*ibid.*).

Every context is unique for each country, so the South Korean case certainly cannot be generalized all over the world, but it was the first role-model to prove that elections could be managed very successfully during COVID-19. In some other parts of the world – in more than 90 countries where purple fingers of voters marked with indelible ink was still used to deter electoral fraud, detailed protocols have been also introduced to mitigate health risks at polling station. Based on the recommendations from indelible ink manufacturers, EMBs were advised to use the ink product by applying three primary protocols: soap and water, minimum 60 percent alcohol solution or 0.05 percent chlorine solution to sanitize their hands prior to ink application (Darnolf *et al.* 2020).

Special attention was focused to voter education – EMBs were advised to ensure that voters understood new hygiene procedures by using different IEC (Information, Education and Communication) materials: for example, special posters outside polling stations and public service announcements. Voter education efforts should have been made to reach out all citizens, including voters with disabilities and those with low literacy levels (Darnolf *et al.* 2020). But it should be noted that most IEC materials are not powerful enough by themselves to change electorate behavior.⁵ Timeframe to make innovative changes to electoral procedure was unreasonably short, and all these health related protocols – safety measures were novel rituals for majority of voters, unprecedented in their previous experience during elections.

5 IEC materials include various range of products like: infographics, flyers, leaflets, brochures, social media posts, television adverts, audio spots for radio, posters, billboards, murals etc.

All these extraordinary public health measures enacted to guarantee safe conditions for voters, have been benefiting but costly. Lists of procurements, logistic and human resources, financial costs and other necessities were quite extensive. We should be mindful of variations in socio-political context, as well as of diverse levels of resources and infrastructure available by different countries when making post-election evaluation of costs and benefits of election related mitigation measures.

To give an illustrative example – in Ukraine, with 35.7 million of voting age population, additional costs of implementing extraordinary public health measures during COVID-19 are estimated at 46 million USD, or 1.29 USD additional cost per voter. Ukraine was significant for one more positive example – EMBs organized in advance an Election Day simulation exercise to identify potential problems during Ukraine’s 2020 local elections (IFES 2020). In South Korea, for example, Covid-19 measures alone (in particular personal protective equipment – PPE) came to 16 million USD, which equates to approximately 9% of the total election cost, or 0.37 USD additional cost per voter. The ‘champion’ of spending of extra-funds on elections are, as it can be expected, USA with additional cost that have been estimated to 2 billion of USD (with voting age population of approx. 225,15 million) – additional cost per voter was estimated to be 7.84 USD, mainly for organizing online registration, postal voting, in-person voting and public education (source: Asplund *et al.* 2020).

It is important to emphasize that in regular time, before outbreak of COVID-19, research evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between ample funding and election quality. Better-run elections are often those which are better resourced – when funding is cut, election quality is cut. As Toby points out, it is therefore “essential that there is sufficient investment in electoral democracy for elections to function properly and democratic ideals to be achieved” (Toby 2020, 63). Fair elections require investment, and investment in elections is long term policy orientation in election management – especially during or after the pandemic, election budgets should not be reduced.

HYBRID MODES OF VOTING DURING COVID-19

Global overview of risk mitigation measures implemented, or ‘invented’ during national elections in COVID-19 pandemic presents an extensive list of measures that are of a hybrid nature⁶ – a mixture of

⁶ We are using the term “hybrid” in the colloquial sense – something that is a mixture, of mixed character, composed of two or more different elements.

in-person, in-polling station voting protocols with already existing Special Voting Arrangements (SVAs). SVAs are defined as ‘alternative methods of voting’ to the more ‘conventional’ or ‘ordinary’ voting in person at a polling station. These broadly used definition include alternative voting methods, safeguard voting measures, convenience voting, special voting channels, etc. While in practice several forms of SVAs exist, the four methods presented below have been of particular relevance for in-country voting during the COVID-19 pandemic:⁷

Early voting – an in-person opportunity for submitting one’s vote at a polling station before election day. Early voting can make it easier to maintain the secrecy and integrity of the vote, unlike in the other SVAs, it is conducted in a controlled environment – protocols should outline where and in what timeframe a voter can cast his/her ballot, as well as where and how completed ballots must be counted and stored. Postal voting – those measures that allow a voter to submit ballot by physical post to the election administration. Postal voting is the most convenient form of voting, especially to be considered amidst the COVID-19.⁸ The key prerequisite for this method is that the postal service is reliable – in the sense it is organized and functions properly, and that it is secure, i.e. safe from intentional interference.

Mobile voting – allows members of the election administration to visit voters either at home or at an institution in which they reside with a mobile ballot box to facilitate their vote. This method is different from special polling stations, as it involves a ballot box being brought upon request for a single voter, while special polling stations usually require a threshold of voters and involve establishing the controlled environment in an institution of residence such as a hospital, nursing home or prison. Proxy voting – enables an authorized individual to cast or transmit a ballot on behalf of the voter. While proxy voting is generally restricted to special circumstances, some countries allow it for any reason. In most cases, voters must request to vote by proxy in advance and a procedure must be defined for the voters and their proxies to identify themselves. Many countries limit the number of proxies per voter to mitigate any manipulation of votes.

7 A detailed maps of availability of different SVAs in Europe, as well as legal regulations that define different SVAs in individual European countries, see in: Heinmaa 2020.

8 The USA and, in much lesser extent Poland expanded model of postal voting during COVID-19 in their 2020 presidential elections. Postal voting in the USA recorded a dramatic increase from approx. 17% in 2016 (around 23 million votes) to over 41% (under 36 million votes) in 2020, when in Poland less than 1% of voters registered in-country requested to vote by mail (Asplund *et al.* 2021).

A comparative study of voting methods conducted in 51 countries worldwide during COVID-19 in 2020 reveals that, in total, 63 per cent – 32 out of 51 states that held national elections or referendums made use of at least one SVA. Furthermore, 23 countries (45%) extended existing SVAs for people with COVID-19 or under quarantine (Asplund *et al.* 2021). Adaptation of pre-existing SVAs was, especially in many countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region the predominant approach in election management during COVID-19. The more detailed breakdown of data on SVAs used during 2020 shows that mobile ballot boxes were used in 21 countries, early voting was made possible in 15 countries, while postal voting was enabled in 8 countries, and proxy voting in 4 countries. COVID-19 risk mitigation measures were implemented in 11 countries. Still, in 19 countries, none of the above-mentioned voting arrangements were not made available for voters. Researchers concluded that the examples of countries adopting innovative, entirely new SVA procedures, beyond COVID-19 related arrangements in polling stations, were rarely and “difficult to locate” (Asplund *et al.* 2021).

These SVAs are permitted in countries throughout the world, especially in Western world, but they are rather ‘exception than the rule’ – they are legally allowed or used in ‘certain circumstances’ and their patterns vary considerably. There are also risks, negative consequences and political controversies regarding use of SVAs, including the risks of possible misuse, or fraud, such as heightened risk of ‘family voting’, etc. Both Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and EU European Commission highlight important considerations for voting through SVAs. Venice Commission is of opinion that the use of mobile ballot boxes is “undesirable because of the attendant serious risk of fraud” (The Venice Commission 2002, paragraph 40). That is why precautionary measures for adequate use of SVAs should include: mechanisms for reliable voter identification, ensuring the secrecy and non-coercion of the vote, preventing manipulation of results, guaranteeing functioning postal or other relevant services, and the concurrent costs and capacities of EMBs (European Commission 2018).

As a potential solution to multiple challenges of election during COVID-19, Landman and Splendore (2020) are suggesting a “mixed system of voting” which may include:

1. postal voting for out-of-country people and those who are over 65;
2. online voting⁹ for people with certificate electronic signature;

9 The literature sometimes uses the term ‘e-voting’ to describe ballots cast online. But it is also in use distinctive term ‘internet voting’ to distinguish this method from voting

3. standard voting in polling stations under strict health safety measures for the rest of people.

But the problem with this, shall we call it – “hybrid system of voting” is that there are numerous challenges to be resolved first, in order to opt for this costly change in election administration policy. First and foremost – both postal and online voting methods must be sustainable, secure and reliable. Postal voting has become highly controversial owing to the belief that such a system may be biased to particular party affiliations. Any online solution faces problems relating to information security – the threat of deliberate cyber attacks, especially from abroad, and hacking more generally, as well as questions over the integrity of the results, as was seen during the alleged Russian interference in the USA Presidential elections in 2016. There is also a question of reliability, due to some shortcomings in the hardware and software available for online voting. Both postal and online voting can generate mistrust in elections and the rejection of an unfavorable outcome. Even optimistic expectations that the novel blockchain technology could provide some of the solutions to many security questions in this regard is not sustained.

Namely, some authors are challenging suggestions that voting over the Internet or voting on the blockchain would increase election security, and finds out that “such claims might be wanting and misleading” and that blockchains may introduce “additional problems for voting systems”, with conclusion that “this state of affairs will continue as long as standard tactics such as malware, zero day, and denial-of-service attacks continue to be effective” (Park *et al.* 2021). These authors are concluding that electronic, online, and blockchain-based voting systems are more vulnerable to serious failures than available paper-ballot-based alternatives. That is why the surprising “power of paper” remains highly appreciated by EMBs, since low-tech paper ballots may help protect against vulnerabilities of electronic voting systems – i.e. malfunctions or attacks of higher-tech voting system components (Park *et al.* 2021).

RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

If elections are the most reliable indicator of the level of people’s trust to democracy, it seems that people are not ready to defend democratic rituals at any cost – especially if massive gatherings during elections present a serious threat to their health. IDEA’s data base on

at electronic voting machines (EVM) at polling stations, which is also referred to as ‘e-voting’ (EU Commission 2018, 5).

voter turnout collected in elections held in 100 countries worldwide – at all continents, show that, when comparing voters’ turnout in elections held during COVID pandemic 2020-2021 to average turnout in elections held between 2008 and 2019 (before COVID-19):

- a) voter turnout declined in 65% of observed 100 countries – mean decline is 9.96%;
- b) voter turnout increased in 35 % of observed 100 countries – mean increase is 7.91% (source: International IDEA 2022).

If this is so, can we conclude that people are losing trust in democracy, and that democracy is in decline, globally – and what should be done in regard to these trends? There is nuanced evidence that turnout in many countries during COVID-19 is likely to be even lower than it might otherwise be during natural disasters, for example - floods (James and Alihodzic 2020, 9). That is why the examples of countries, particularly in the worldwide regions that are often faced with seasonal natural disasters, needs to be studied and followed when organizing elections.

Question emerges – how to help democracies to enhance their resilience to emergencies as well as their ability to deliver in uncertain times? In general, it seems clear that a more consistent crisis management of elections should be blueprinted in advance, and that parliaments need to consistently carry out oversight of such plans (Murphy 2020, 67). Club de Madrid and International IDEA recommended that election-related authorities should prepare plans, strategies and roadmaps that ensure a consultative and transparent process during emergency situations, especially when electoral calendars are changed (Club de Madrid and International IDEA *n.d.*, 13-15).

Experts gathered by The ACE Project, suggest that development agencies and partner countries should plan and implement electoral assistance within the democratic governance framework by thinking ahead 5 to 10 years, in all three aspects of the electoral cycle, rather than reacting to each electoral event as it occurs. Landman and Splendore (2020) have concluded that in the medium-term perspective, every country needed a backup plan to hold the election and that a solid electoral framework needed to contemplate pandemic solutions. That is why decision makers should always have in mind a holistic ‘build back better’ strategy aimed at reducing the risk to the people and communities to create a more resilient preconditions in the wake of future disasters and shocks.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has provided ample evidence that elections could be successfully safeguarded during the pandemic through preventive health risk management measures. Our analysis shows that postponement of elections during emergency/pandemic should not be regarded as an example of a 'good practice', and that 'postponement paradox' should be regarded as a threat to institutional stability and resilience of democracy, and therefore cannot be recommended as a pro-democratic model of future crisis management in the case of pandemic.

Nevertheless, there was no ample evidence to conclude that election management bodies were prodigiously expanding already existing special arrangements of voting. The traditional vision of an election – that citizens vote in-person at polling stations using a paper ballot remained unchanged during COVID-19. What we could have seen was a lot of usual 'paper work' produced by hybrid mixture of traditional voting protocols and already existing SVAs (especially early, postal, mobile and proxy voting) with new health-risk mitigation measures related to COVID-19.

An equally important finding of this analysis is that this pandemic has produced significant democratic legitimacy deficit of elections in many countries, due to decreased voter turnout. In as much as it is important for decision makers to avoid delaying of elections, analysis shows that it is even more important to incentivize massive participation of citizens in elections. Furthermore, analysis shows that it is necessary to ensure not only political willingness, but also to invest increased logistical, expert, human and especially financial resources to enable innovative redesigning of traditional voting protocols during pandemic. To achieve these goals, EMBs could use The Electoral Cycle model as a good planning tool, designed by the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network project, to better understand the cyclical nature of various challenges produced by pandemic and creating of contingency plans for elections in advance, in all three phases of electoral cycle (pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral)

This paper is not presenting a complete comparative assessment of COVID-19 related voting protocols, or codes of conduct, neither for voters, nor for poll staff. Main intention of this paper is to highlight the necessity of future electoral reform to focus on the paradigm of hybrid voting schemes. Analysis shows that hybridizing of two existing voting protocols: traditional in-person in-polling stations voting with already existing SVAs does not provide 'the best of both worlds' in the context

of pandemic emergency. Further research and continuous secondary data analysis should be made with the aim of designing emergency voting protocols that will be hard to manipulate during possible future pandemic or natural disasters.

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CORONAVIRUS AND SCIENCE-RELATED COMMUNICATION BY POPULIST PARTIES

Abstract

The relation between science and populism has already been investigated by relevant sociopolitical literature. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has produced remarkable changes in how politics, science, and society relate to each other. Therefore, there is a need to explore further what science is to populists and how populist parties have dealt with science in times of pandemic. How much has science-related communication by populist parties changed after the outbreak of Coronavirus? What topics have populist science-related messages been about? Are there differences in the science-related communication of ideologically different populist parties, and between populist parties in government and in opposition? The research tries to answer these questions through a thematic analysis of populist communication on Twitter. The empirical investigation is carried out through topic modelling on a dataset of 1.133 science-related populist tweets. The focus is on a pertinent single case study, Italy. Here there are three different populist parties in terms of ideology, which have been both in government and in opposition during the pandemic. Findings highlight that different populist parties have resorted to different science-related rhetoric and that the two Italian populist parties on the radical right, the League and FdI, have engaged in “counter-science” and “anti-science” communication.

Keywords: Coronavirus, populism, science, populist communication, twitter, thematic analysis, Italian populist parties

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INTRODUCTION

Resorting to an expression of French sociologist Marcel Mauss, the Covid-19 pandemic has been described as a “total social fact”, meaning “an event that affects every single aspect of society” (Alteri *et al.* 2021, 2). There are no doubts that what we still have to get out of properly is not only an unprecedented global health crisis, but also an all-encompassing crisis impacting on politics, economy, society and, of course, science. Moreover, in Europe, this new, unexpected, “sui-generis” crisis (Hubé & Bobba 2021) is grafted onto the long trail of the political consequences of previous financial, eurozone and refugee crises, which have not yet been exhausted.

Therefore, the Coronavirus pandemic has produced remarkable changes in how politics, science, and society relate to each other. Politicians have politicized science more than ever, scientists have over-exposed themselves in the media (both traditional media and social media), and citizens have mobilized both in favor of and against science. Against this backdrop, it should come as no surprise that a scholarly debate on the relation between pandemic and populism has arisen since the early days of the Coronavirus crisis. Populism, in fact, is the political phenomenon that probably most characterized the European political landscape of the 2010s (Gerbaudo 2021), and a strong correlation between crises and populism exists (Hubé & Bobba 2021, 2-8).

Nonetheless, the debate on the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on populism in Europe has thus far focused above all on the electoral consequences of the pandemic for populists, and particularly for populist radical right (PRR) parties (Mudde 2007). Furthermore, scholars have been far from reaching a consensus on the possible state of health of PRR parties after the pandemic. Some have foreseen that the Coronavirus will be an electoral ally of these parties, or of populism more generally (Burni 2020). Others have predicted the opposite, describing populism as the “victim” of the pandemic (Betz 2020a; English 2020; Samaras 2020). According to the broader in scope analysis by Paolo Gerbaudo (2021), the Coronavirus crisis may have even given way to a “post-populist phase”, marked by a neo-statist momentum. Only a few studies within this debate have advanced a cautious, and thus more convincing, interpretation (Wondreys & Mudde 2020).

Beyond that, what is really missing is attention to other aspects of the relation between pandemic and populism, including, above all, the implications of the Coronavirus for how populists relate to knowledge and science. With few notable exceptions (Casarões & Magalhães 2021;

Mede *et al.* 2021; Mede & Schäfer 2020), the way populists have dealt with science in times of Covid-19 is, for now, understudied within Political Sociology and Political Science literature. Or, at best, studies have been superficial, reporting in a rather descriptive manner some cases of populist parties or politicians who have spread conspiracy or fringe theories (Betz 2020b; Samaras 2020). This is even more surprising considering that the relation between science and populism has already been investigated by sociopolitical literature, which has stressed the tension between “common sense” (of “the people”) and “scientific/expert knowledge” (of “the elite”) in populist ideology and communication.

Thus, both the relation between pandemic and populism and the one between populism and science have already been sufficiently examined, but there is a need to explore further the triangular link connecting these three elements: pandemic, populism, and science. This is the general aim of the present contribution, which focuses on science-related communication by populist parties, before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Three main questions guide the research:

[RQ1] How much has science-related communication by populist parties changed (increased?) after the outbreak of Coronavirus?

[RQ 2] What topics have the science-related tweets by populist parties been about?

[RQ 3] Are there differences in the science-related communication of different populist parties (in terms of ideology), and between populist parties in government and in opposition?

The remainder of this contribution is structured thus. The next section illustrates the theoretical framework, clarifying what is meant by “populism”, what we already know about the way populists relate to expert knowledge and science, and how the pandemic could have prompted changes in the relation between populism and science/expertise. Then, I empirically address the three research questions, via a thematic analysis of science-related populist communication on Twitter. After having expounded on the data and the methods, the empirical analysis will be carried out on a single relevant case study: Italy. This country has been selected for two main reasons. The first concerns the role of science in the Italian public and political debate. Before Covid-19, science was already a relevant topic to the Italian public sphere debate. During the last decade, science became a profoundly politicized issue, so much so that the country has been deemed “a strategic case to understand the development, dissemination, and use of public epistemologies” (Brandmayr 2021, 50). For instance, the political debate on vaccines was very strong in the years preceding the pandemic, pitting populist

parties (which were against compulsory vaccines for children and in some cases close to “no-vax” stances), versus mainstream parties (in favor of compulsory vaccines and “pro-vax”) (Brandmayr 2021). Considering this already significant level of politicization of science in Italy, the country appears as a particularly apt context to analyze further science-related communication by populist actors. The second reason, instead, concerns the state of populism in Italy. Several populist parties with different characteristics have risen in the country throughout the last decade. First, there was the sudden success of the “neither left nor right” populism of the Five Star Movement (M5S). Then, from 2018 on, the strengthening of PRR parties – the League and Brothers of Italy (FdI) – which has changed the balance of power within the right-wing Italian alliance (Albertazzi et al. 2021). Furthermore, during two years of pandemic, two governments – “Conte II” and “Draghi” – have alternated, and these have been backed by different populist parties. In short, the Italian case allows us to examine science-related communication by populist parties of different ideological “types” and that have been one in government (M5S), one in opposition (FdI), one first in opposition and then in government (League) during the pandemic.

THE PANDEMIC AND THE COMPLEX RELATION BETWEEN POPULISM AND SCIENCE

Populism is one of the most debated concepts in Political Sociology and Political Science literature. However, the definition of populism that has collected the greatest consensus in the last years is that proposed by the “ideational approach”. According to this definition, populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people” (Mudde 2004, 543).

Such antagonism between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite” is not confined to the political realm, and the “elite” which is perceived as “corrupt” is not only the political one. While traditional parties and other “political powers” (typically supranational institutions, such as the European Union), are the main populists’ enemies (together with nonnatives in the case of PRR parties), experts, intellectuals and scientists are also considered as part of the despised elite. Therefore, populists usually loathe expert knowledge (Caramani 2017), and a non-secondary populist feature is trusting the “common sense” of the people while distrusting the “specific knowledge” allegedly supported by the elite and considered as

disconnected from practical and ordinary everyday life (Moffitt & Tormey 2014). The connection between “anti-intellectualism” – or distrust of intellectuals and knowledge-based institutions – and populism has already been emphasized by empirical research (Merkley 2020). However, the pandemic has inevitably augmented the penetration of technical-scientific expertise into the political sphere, “obligating” governments to rely more than ever on technical-scientific recommendations. The Coronavirus crisis has also led scientists to expose themselves in the media in a totally unprecedented way. As a backlash, the pandemic may also have made scientists the targets of populist “attacks” more than ever (Brubaker 2020, 2-7; Eberl et al. 2021).

In this regard, some authors have conceptualized a new “variant” of populism, labelled as “science-related populism”. This is defined as “a set of ideas suggesting a fundamental conflict between an allegedly virtuous people and an allegedly immoral academic elite over who should be in charge of science-related decision-making and over what is deemed ‘true knowledge’” (Mede *et al.* 2021, 274)¹. The new “science-related” populist variant would not stand for a rejection of scientific knowledge in itself, but rather for a contestation of the decision-making sovereignty of established science, aiming to replace it with the legitimate “science-related decision-making sovereignty and truth-speaking sovereignty” of the people (Mede & Schäfer 2020, 484). Thus, “science-related populism” is something more than anti-intellectualism, which, according to Merkley (2020, 26), can be defined as “a generalized suspicion and mistrust of intellectuals and experts of whatever kind”. In fact, what really distinguishes “science-related populism” is considering “the people” as just and superior not only in moral terms (such as in the “traditional” populist ideology), but also in epistemological terms.

The new “science-related populism” conceptualization, which, arguably not by chance, has been proposed in times of pandemic, offers the starting point for problematizing and further reflecting on the relationship between populism and knowledge/science. This call has recently been reiterated also by Ylä-Anttila (2018), who has argued that “the relation between knowledge and populism needs a more nuanced analysis”. Above all, the author has convincingly stressed that populists may rely on two different “strategies” for contesting epistemic authorities. On one hand, there is the more well-known valorization of the “common sense” of “the people” over expertise, which the author labels

1 An only apparently similar concept, introduced before Covid-19, is that of “medical populism”, described as “a political style based on performances of public health crises that pit ‘the people’ against ‘the establishment’” (Lasco & Curato 2019).

“epistemological populism”. On the other hand, there is what the author names “counterknowledge”, that is, “contestation of epistemic authorities by advocating politically charged alternative knowledge authorities” (Ylä-Anttila 2018, 3-4).

Drawing on these insightful arguments, we may wager that during the pandemic populists have made use of two different types of science-related communication. Firstly, “*anti-science*” communication (deriving from the “epistemological populism” strategy); secondly, “*counter-science*” communication (deriving from the “counterknowledge” strategy).

DATA AND METHODS

Parties that can be defined as “populists” according to the ideational approach are listed in the “PopuList”, approved by more than 80 academics (Rooduijn et al. 2019). Four Italian parties appear on this list: *Forza Italia*, *Fratelli d’Italia*, *Lega* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*. However, in this research, we focus on the last three only. Indeed, in recent years *Forza Italia* has “sub-contracted populism and Euroscepticism” to its allies on the radical right and, especially during the pandemic, it has “reinvented itself as a moderate and pro-EU party” (Albertazzi et al. 2021, 12; 2).

The analysis is based on a collection of science-related tweets posted by the official Twitter accounts of these parties. The time span covers from January 1, 2019 to October 1, 2021. The investigation, therefore, comprises the whole pre-Covid year (2019) and more than a year and a half of pandemic crisis. The watershed between the pre-Coronavirus period and the post-Coronavirus period is set at 30 January 2020, the date of the first confirmed infections from Covid-19 in Italy.

Through the Twitter API, I downloaded all the tweets published by the three Italian populist parties in the selected time frame and containing keywords related to science and expert knowledge². After a preprocessing aimed at removing the tweets that – even containing the keywords – were not really centered on expert knowledge and science, the dataset comprised 1.133 tweets: 585 from the League, 449 from FdI, and 99 from the M5S.

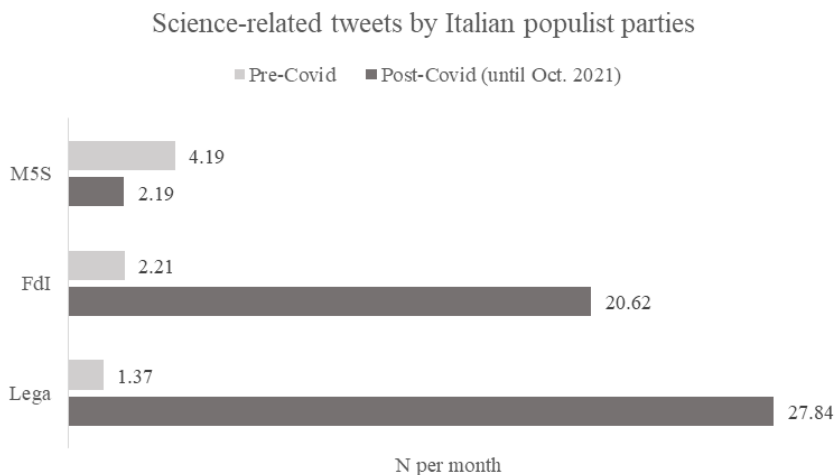
2 *Scienz-a/e; scienziat-o/a/i/e; scientific-o/a/i/che; dottor-e/i; dottoress-a/e; dr.; dott.ssa; virolog-o/a/i/he; immunolog-o/a/i/he; infettivolog-o/a/i/he; epidemiolog-o/a/i/he; burioni; accademic-o/a; professor-e/i; professoress-a/e; prof.; prof.ssa; professoron-e/i; espert-o/a/i/e; ricercator-e/i; ricercatric-e/i*. “Burioni” is the only proper name included in the research as, to the best of my knowledge, he was the only scientist actively involved in the Italian political debate before Covid-19 (Brandmayr 2021).

To conduct the content analysis of these science-related tweets, I relied on T-LAB, a software consisting of a set of linguistic, statistical, and graphic tools for text analysis. These tools can be used in several research methods, including text mining methods, and in particular topic modelling, which I have adopted here. Topic modelling is a method for thematic analysis that realizes an automatic classification of textual units, by finding recurring patterns of word usage in textual material. In other words, through topic modelling, we can detect the groups of words (or the “topics”) that best represents the information deriving from the analyzed text, or, in even simpler terms, “which topics the text is about”. One of the main advantages of topic modelling is that the classification of textual material is carried out through a *bottom-up* and not a top-down approach, meaning that the thematic analysis is not conducted by using categories predefined by the researcher. The researcher gives no input as to how the data should be analyzed. Instead, their only task is to choose the number of topics they want to find in the text. Then, the topic model (the T-LAB software uses one of the most frequently employed topic modelling algorithms, i.e., Latent Dirichlet Allocation, or LDA) provides the topics attributable to specific subsets of the text and consisting of words that often occur in the same topic. At the end of the topic modelling process, the researcher can easily explore the characteristics of every single emerged topic.

RESULTS

First of all, the number of science-related tweets in the pre-Covid and post-Covid periods was observed [RQ1]. In this regard, considering that, in the aftermath of the Coronavirus outbreak, for many months the virus has been the almost only relevant issue in the public debate, it would have been logical to expect an increase in the volume of tweets concerning science from any political actor. Nonetheless, the first noteworthy finding of this research is that the monthly number of tweets concerning science and expertise published by the M5S has been clearly lower during the pandemic than in the pre-Covid year.

Figure 1. Number of science-related tweets by Italian populist parties



Source: the author's analysis

In the pre-Covid period, the M5S's science-related tweets were more than those of the two PRR parties. Since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis, it has been the opposite. Therefore, science and expertise in time of pandemic have been a quantitatively relevant theme in the social communication of populists on the radical right only. One plausible conclusion is that the M5S has had no interest in politicizing science. It is likely that the M5S, being constantly in government, has preferred not to politicize the (problematic) management of the health emergency and of the public role of scientists [RQ3].

To answer RQ2 and RQ3, topic modelling was performed on three different *corpora*, each composed of the collection of tweets retrieved from the official account of one Italian populist party. The process was set up in such a way as to obtain 10 topics for each *corpus*. Table 1 lists the 10 topics that emerged from the tweets of each party, reporting the percentage weight of each topic within the respective *corpus* of tweets.

Table 1. Topics emerging from the three corpora containing science-related tweets published by Italian populist parties. Italics signal a proper name.

Five Star Movement (M5S)		The League (Lega)		Brothers of Italy (FdI)	
TOPIC	%	TOPIC	%	TOPIC	%
Researcher(s)	17,03	<i>De Donno</i>	19,31	<i>Gozzini</i>	13,38
Interview	12,62	Professor	12,46	Coronavirus	12,01
Emergency	11,36	Data	11,99	Task Force	11,35
Science	11,04	<i>Conte</i>	10,30	No Curfew	11,11
Health	10,57	Researcher(s)	8,88	Technical Scientific Committee	10,32
Education	8,52	Hydroxychloroquine	8,24	Economy	10,16
Fake news	8,04	No Curfew	8,22	Home	8,45
Job(s)	8,04	Minister	7,82	FdI	8,45
Government	7,26	Virus	7,30	University	7,47
Technical Scientific Committee	5,52	Facebook	5,47	Data	7,31

Source: the author's analysis

A first look at the Table suggests both similarities and differences in the science-related communication of the three populist parties. Starting from the similarities, the predominant topic arising from the tweets of both Italian populist parties on the radical right is a proper name: (Giuseppe) De Donno for the League and (Giovanni) Gozzini for FdI. Who are they and how did the two parties talk about them? First, both are professors. De Donno, who unfortunately died in July 2021, was the first doctor experimenting with treatments against Covid via transfusions of “hyperimmune plasma”: a therapy that involved infusing the appropriately treated blood of people already infected with Coronavirus into other infected patients. This therapy was considered controversial by most of the scientific community from the beginning, and it has eventually been judged not suitable for treating Covid by

established medicine. To explore how the League has spoken about prof. De Donno on Twitter, we can report some text segments (i.e., tweets), that correspond most to the characteristics of the “*De Donno*” topic.

Table 2. Segments corresponding most to the characteristics of the “De donno” topic, sorted by weighed descending order (translation from Italian to English by the author)

Segment	Score
A path of experimentation that is giving excellent results and that deserves all possible support. ++ BURIONI: “THE PLASMA CURE IS EXPENSIVE”, THE REPLY OF PROF. DE DONNO ++ Prof. Giuseppe De Donno: “Prof. Burioni perhaps did the math badly. The plasma is free because it is donated by the people and returned to the people”.	0,64
A nice exchange between Enrico Montesano and prof. De Donno, who shows all the difficulties experienced and the attacks suffered in his meritorious work of disseminating hyperimmune plasma therapy.	0,51
De Donno, a great man 🤝 “My treatment is democratic. For this, they stand against me. Plasma therapy is cheap, it works great, and it doesn’t make billions. And I’m a country doctor, not a Big Pharma shareholder”	0,43

Source: the author’s analysis

As can be seen from these tweets, the League has conducted a resolute Twitter campaign in support of prof. De Donno. His controversial experimentation has been praised and even defended from the criticisms of mainstream scientists, such as prof. Burioni. Hyperimmune plasma treatment has also been described with typically populist tones (“the plasma is free because it is donated *by the people* and returned *to the people*”). The classic populist distinction between the “pure” countryside and the “corrupt” city has been reasserted, but as related to science (De Donno as a “*country doctor*”). Ultimately, supporting the hyperimmune plasma therapy with such motivations can be interpreted as a way of supporting the replacement of official science with a “counter-science” of “the people”.

As regards the main topic of the FdI’s *corpus*, Gozzini is a professor of history at the University of Siena, who, during a radio broadcast (22 February 2021), insulted the FdI’s leader, Giorgia Meloni, calling her “a frog with a wide mouth, a cow, a sow”.

Table 3. Segments corresponding most to the characteristics of the “Gozzini” topic, sorted by weighed descending order (translation from Italian to English by the author)

Segment	Score
Offenses to Giorgia Meloni, Caiata (FdI): I ask for the immediate removal of Prof. Gozzini from his role. Faced with the despicable insults addressed to Giorgia Meloni by professor (title undeserved) #Gozzini, there is only one thing to do: removing Gozzini from the chair he occupies at the University of Siena.	0,69
Prof Giovanni Gozzini addressed these insults to Giorgia Meloni and the silence of women on the left is deafening and shameful. The University of Siena pays the salary to a certain professor Giovanni #Gozzini who on the radio calls Giorgia #Meloni “a cow”, “a sow” guilty of not having voted the confidence on #Draghi.	0,51
In a democracy, no criticism must ever degenerate into violence. Come on Giorgia! It is shameful that a university professor who should deal with the education of young excellences uses words of contempt and violence against a woman, the president #Meloni. From #Gozzini, rantings full of that rancor typical of certain left-wing intellectuals.	0,39

Source: the author’s analysis

As table 3 displays, the FdI Twitter account has been very committed to defending the leader Meloni from the insults addressed to her by prof. Gozzini. However, the party has also taken the opportunity to extend its “counter-attacks” against all “left-wing intellectuals”.

We have so far found that the main topics emerging from the *corpora* of the two Italian PRR parties are related to a “counterknowledge/counter-science” rhetoric (Lega) and to an “anti-knowledge/anti-science” rhetoric (FdI), respectively. As already mentioned, the former aims to challenge established epistemic authorities by supporting politically charged alternative knowledge authorities (Ylä-Anttila 2018), such as prof. De Donno. The latter aims instead to directly attack (or counter-attack) intellectuals or experts/scientists, revealing a more generalized anti-intellectualism.

To gauge whether these types of rhetoric are present within other topics of the two PRR parties, we can take a deeper look at the words that are more characteristic of each of the topics. For instance, another important topic in the science-related tweets of the League is “Hydroxychloroquine”. By exploring the words that make up this topic most, we can highlight that, in addition to “hydroxychloroquine” (which

has the greatest percentage weight within the topic, even if it is shared with other topics), another relevant word is “*Cavanna*”. This is another proper name. Luigi Cavanna is an Italian scientist who promoted both the use of hydroxychloroquine as an effective therapy for Covid, and the domiciliary management of patients with Covid (thus “domiciliary” is another important word within the “Hydroxychloroquine” topic). In the words of Professor Cavanna retweeted by the League’s account, hydroxychloroquine has only two “major flaws”: “it costs very little, and Trump likes it”. By supporting prof. Cavanna, the League has sponsored the use of hydroxychloroquine despite the contrary opinion of both the AIFA (Italian Medicines Agency) and the WHO. Therefore, the League has used similar rhetoric to those of other PRR actors - primarily Bolsonaro and Trump - who have united to promote hydroxychloroquine in spite of contradicting recommendations by official medicine. This reinforces the interpretation that “hydroxychloroquine has been an integral tool of medical populist performance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic” and that “medical populism addressing the coronavirus crisis has led populists to build an alt-science network” (Casarões & Magalhães 2021, 199).

Other evidence that the League has engaged in counter-science rhetoric comes from the analysis of the “Virus” and “No Curfew” topics. Within the “Virus” topic, relevant words are “Wuhan”, “laboratory” and “Chinese”. This is because the League has often remarked on the foreign, Chinese, origin of the virus, linking the issue of the health emergency to one of its electoral “strong points”: immigration. In addition, the League has promoted the thesis that Covid-19 came out of a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan, although this argument remains strongly contested. Finally, the League has often reiterated through its tweets the futility of some anti-contagion measures supported by the mainstream scientific community and implemented by the Italian government, such as the quarantine and the curfew. Indeed, “no curfew” and “quarantine” are the most important words within the “No Curfew” topic. This may appear surprising, considering that the League has been in government since February 2021, thus throughout the period in which the curfew has been in force in Italy. Arguably, the League has nonetheless criticized the curfew to distinguish itself from the other governing partners and continue to wink at “counter-science” stances.

Before moving on to the other PRR party, it should be mentioned that, although it mostly resorted to a “counter-science” rhetoric, the League has also used an “anti-science/experts” communication. This is signaled by the many proper names of scientists which are present

among the more characteristic words of several League's topics. Roberto Burioni, Andrea Crisanti and Massimo Galli, mainstream scientists who have over-exposed themselves in the Italian media during the pandemic crisis, have been attacked repeatedly by the League's tweets.

However, more than the League, the party that employed "anti-science" rhetoric most was Brothers of Italy. This is evident by analyzing the "Technical Scientific Committee" and "Task Force" topics. Many attacks by FdI have precisely been against the members of the Technical Scientific Committee (CTS) and the experts of the task forces that have backed both Italian governments in the management of the health emergency. These technicians ("technician" is the most important word within the "Technical Scientific Committee" topic) and scientists have been blamed for making decisions "without any scientific basis", aimed at implementing "control mechanisms" over the people. In a typical populist and conspiracist manner, members of the CTS have also been accused of keeping the results of their scientific reports "secret" (another relevant word within the "Technical Scientific Committee" topic) from the Italian people. Also, similarly to the League, Burioni and Crisanti have been targets of many rhetorical attacks by FdI's tweets. Meloni's party has also resorted to "counter-science" rhetoric, albeit to a lesser extent than its radical right-wing ally. It is telling in this regard that a topic labelled "No Curfew" has emerged from the thematic analysis of both the League's and the FdI's *corpora*. The curfew, as well as other anti-contagion measures, have been described by FdI as "useless", "illogical", and "absurd" measures to be "abolished" (all words that are linked to the "No Curfew" topic).

Therefore, both Italian PRR parties have engaged in "counter-science" (the League more) and "anti-science" (FdI more) rhetoric. However, this is not to say that the whole of their science-related communication on Twitter has been devoted to these ends. Both parties have employed neutral and more rarely positive references to science too, and part of their science-related communication has been aimed at "self-promotion". For instance, there is a "Facebook" topic emerging from the League's tweets because many of them have advertised science-related FB posts from the party leader Salvini, the "Captain". And there is a "FdI" topic emerging from the FdI's tweets and containing words that reveal, once again, FdI's efforts to defend itself from "attacks" by intellectuals or professors, such as prof. Simon Levis Sullam from the Cà Foscari University.

What about the other Italian populist party, the Five Star Movement? Compared to the two populist parties on the radical right, the

M5S's science-related communication has appeared as characterized by more positive and decidedly more "institutional" tones. This is arguably a consequence of the fact that the M5S has always been in government throughout the pandemic, managing the health emergency during two consecutive cabinets [RQ3], firstly together with the Democratic Party as member of the Conte II government, and then with all the parties supporting the "national unity" government chaired by Mario Draghi. It is significant that the M5S's preponderant topic is "Researcher". This topic has also emerged from the communication of the League, but with completely different characteristics. As regards the League, text segments with both positive, neutral and negative tones belong to this topic (that is, researchers are sometimes praised, sometimes criticized, and still others only mentioned). As for the M5S, instead, the references to researchers and research within the "Researcher" topic are only positive. Above all, the M5S has emphasized its commitment to improving the "recruitment" (a very important word within the "Researcher" topic) of researchers in the Italian educational system and to open up science, by promoting Open Access methods of publications. Close to these issues are those of another relevant topic in the M5S's communication, i.e., "Education".

The M5S's Twitter communication has also appeared to be aimed at combating fake news and "counter-knowledge/science". This is what can be detected by analyzing the "Fake News" and the "Health" topics. The M5S has invited citizens to beware of "fake news" and "hoaxes", reminding them how these have been refuted by the experts of the Ministry of Health and of the Higher Health Institute. This finding is remarkable and, in some sense, surprising, since many M5S's exponents (including the founder Beppe Grillo) endorsed some "anti-science" positions, and in particular "no-vax" positions, in the past. The pandemic could have provided a chance to re-politicize the debate on science and vaccines in a populist key. But evidently, the strategy of the governing M5S has been the opposite: not to dally with anti-science.

Another topic is shared by FdI and the M5S: "Technical Scientific Committee". However, the contents of the topic are very different in the two cases. As for the M5S, references to the CTS have been positive. For instance, the work of the CTS has been encouraged, and the necessity to continue to follow the CTS's suggestions has been recalled.

CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with science-related communication by populist parties, with the aim of exploring how much and how it has changed following the Coronavirus. Therefore, this contribution is meant as an intervention into the growing debate on the relation between pandemic and populism, which, for the moment, has not focused enough on the implications of the Coronavirus crisis for the way populists conceive expert knowledge and science. By focusing on the Italian context, which seems particularly apt for investigating the relation between populism and science (both before and after Coronavirus), and via a thematic analysis of science-related tweets by Italian populist parties, we have come to a number of relevant conclusions.

First, different populist parties have resorted to different science-related rhetoric. A “neither left nor right” populist party, the M5S, has employed mainly positive references to science. Instead, the two Italian populist parties on the radical right, the League and FdI, have engaged in “counter-science” and “anti-science” communication, although in different proportions. The League has resorted to “counter-science” more, whereas FdI to “anti-science” more. Therefore, this study contributes to the research on populism, science and expertise, by emphasizing both clear differences between ideologically diverse populisms, and more nuanced differences between populist parties in the same political field (the radical right).

Secondly, whether a populist party has been in government or not during the pandemic seems to have had an impact on its position towards science and experts. The only Italian party that has always been in government during the health emergency, the M5S, has tweeted about science less in the post-Covid period than in the pre-Covid period. This has been interpreted as a strategy that sought not to politicize science during the pandemic (due to the complicated handling of the health crisis).

These results reiterate the need to be more cautious both in analyzing the consequences of the pandemic for populists (in fact, we cannot speak of a single “populism”) and in exploring the relationship between knowledge and populists (Ylä-Anttila 2018). Indeed, the research has confirmed that populists do not only valorize the “common sense” of “the people” over expertise. Some of them also employ “counter-science” rhetoric and, to a lesser extent, share conspiracy narratives.

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Review article

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POPULISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Abstract

This paper aims to develop an analysis of how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced populist trends in the Western Balkan countries. Covid-19 pandemic impacted many sectors within the states themselves including health, economy, education, etc. and it produced even greater challenges at an international level. By focusing in the Western Balkans area, the paper focuses on the political system, and more specifically on how the political leadership through specific decision-making processes during the pandemic affected the presence or increase of populist trends. Thus, by focusing into specific decision-making dynamics of the political leadership in the Western Balkan countries, through the use of qualitative and secondary quantitative data, the paper develops an in-depth elaboration on the presence of populism in this area. What is more, the paper addresses the general Covid-19 situation in these countries along with how the political leadership has dealt with the pandemic by further shedding light on the presence of populism and how the handling of the pandemic through specific political decisions emphasized these populist trends.

Keywords: Covid-19, Western Balkan, populism, political leadership, political system

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INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkan countries, as most part of Eastern Europe come from a difficult nondemocratic past. Their efforts in undertaking the democratization processes in the last decades haven't proved sufficient enough for the achievement of consolidated democracies by thus being often labeled as "hybrid regimes", "nonconsolidated democracies", "malign democracies" etc., or as Bieber describes them "stabilitocracies" a term referring to 'governments that claim to secure stability, pretend to espouse EU integration, and rely on informal, clientelist structures, control of the media, and the regular production of crises to hang on to power' (Kemp 2021, 195).

In the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has been the focus of all the national and international actors by bringing along with the health crises many other challenges for all the European countries and especially for the Eastern Europe including the Western Balkans. The latter have faced multiple challenges including the economy, the political system, and the society at large. The crisis has also given greater visibility to many structural weaknesses in the region, from the weak health care systems, low trust in the state, to weak democracy and state capture, while at the same time awakening civic consciousness and serving as a backdrop for increased solidarity among citizens (Bieber *et al.* 2020, 3).

After the countries "officially declared the epidemic, various epidemiological measures were imposed i.e., the ban on movement, social distancing, and suspension of certain activities, which resulted in the deterioration of almost all economic indicators" (Bodroža & Lazić 2021, 33). According to the International Monetary Fund, all the Western Balkan countries' economies were hit by the pandemic which resulted in a considerable decline of the GDP. "Declining economic activity is also complicating public finances and expanding the financing needs of governments. And nonessential consumption and investment are delayed until the uncertainty linked to the crisis is resolved" (Svrtinov *et al.* 2021, 11). What is more "the effects of the pandemic in Western Balkans countries are already severe, but economic support packages will continue to be relevant in order to limit negative effects of the pandemic on labor market, businesses and households" (Terziev *et al.* 2021).

What is more, as a region hardly hit and humbled by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Western Balkan countries' political systems have witnessed an escalation of political tensions among different political actors addressing the pressing issues that the pandemic caused and the solutions to overcome the crises. The way the political leaders of the

Western Balkan countries have dealt with this situation has raised special interest among scholars. The introduction of the state of emergency due to the pandemic has been considered as a focal point for the researcher community to further evidence a growth of authoritarianism in the Western Balkans. During the pandemic, most executive branches of government in the region took on extraordinary powers at the expense of legislatures (Tzifakis 2020, 199), by thus acquiring more decision-making powers at the expense of democratic procedures. Along with the rise of authoritarian trends of the political leadership in the Western Balkan countries, populism also seems to have gained considerable ground because of the specific political discourse that addresses the uncertainties and fears of the populations towards Covid-19. As Bieber *et al.* (2020) put it “the coronavirus might strengthen the strikingly close relationship between authoritarianism and nationalist populism in the region and beyond, based on a dichotomic and moralistic understanding of the world (‘good’ vs ‘bad’ people) and a trend to politically capitalize upon artificially incited fears” (Bieber *et al.* 2020, 1).

Having in consideration the above, the paper tries to further exploit the question on the relationship between authoritarianism and populism in times of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Western Balkan countries. In trying to answer the above, methodologically, the paper focuses on an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data as well as secondary quantitative data with regard to this region. The main assumption that we make is that the closing of the borders along with the declaration of the states of emergency in the WB6 provided fertile ground for an increase of authoritarianism and populism in the region.

The paper continues with the analysis of how the Western Balkan countries handled the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of the measures taken to properly address the situation, and it continues with a specific focus on the political leadership. The latter is further elaborated in the lenses of authoritarianism and populism and how both these trends have manifested themselves in the region.

WESTERN BALKANS AND THE HANDLING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be a difficult test for all the countries worldwide from the most developed countries of the west to the less developed ones. The Western Balkan region makes no exception. With the declaration of the pandemic from WHO, all the states started taking measures with regard to the health of their citizens and the protection of life. These new measures included the wearing of the mask, social distancing, the closure of the most part of public institutions and the transition to online work, etc. What is more, “international airports in all countries were closed for passenger traffic, travel and social gatherings have been restricted or banned, and schools and universities have been closed” (Svrtinov *et al.* 2020, 11).

The most part of the countries of this region declared the curfews with the exception of Serbia and North Macedonia which declared a state of emergency. “Within a month, the circumstances created during the COVID-19 pandemic have further contributed to the overall trend of democratic erosion reversing two decades of reforms in the Western Balkans. The semi-authoritarian regimes in the Balkans have used the emergency situation to achieve almost unlimited power” (Bieber 2020, 9).

What is more, a weak health infrastructure, the low level of investments in health, the emergency of the situation, etc. brought about even more serious consequences in terms of the number of deaths from the Covid-19 in proportion to the overall population.

What is interesting in this regard, is the fact that the political leadership despite the efforts to manage the pandemic took advantage of the situation in the short-term for political credits. “Each ruling elite seems willing to take advantage of the situation in order to gain politically, despite denunciations of such moves as not quite democratic by political opponents, and an unsafe environment for the voters” (Vankovska 2020, 82). “The calculation is simple: the costs of the pandemic and ‘stay-at-home’ practices will soon prove too high – recession is on its way and political elites have no clue how to deal with it” (Vankovska 2020, 82).

In terms of the measures taken by the governments of the six Western Balkan countries, in response to the managing of the pandemic, different scenarios can be evidenced. On March 15th, Serbia introduced a ‘state of exception’, with no legislative approval. On the other hand, North Macedonia, three days later, declared a state of emergency with no legislative approval, and which concentrated the decision-making power in the executive branch. Meanwhile, the caretaker government has been

criticized for having overstepped its mandate, as, allegedly, only one-third of its decrees have been related to the pandemic (Markovikj 2020, 67). The state of emergency was also declared in Bosnia Hercegovina by limiting the legislative powers of the parliament in both levels. The legislative decision-making power was also limited in the case of Montenegro during the first months of the pandemic. Despite not having declared the state of emergency, the legislative was not convened until the end of April (Uljarević et al. 2020, 12).

In the case of Albania, no state of emergency was declared. Instead, the government declared a state of natural disaster which was extended by two months which has been criticized by constitutionalists. “The extension of the state of natural disaster in abusive ways prolongs the possibility for eventual abuse of power, to the detriment of the constitutional freedoms of citizens” (Dule 2021, 3). In Kosovo*, the Prime Minister Kurti was against the declaration of the state of emergency, because it was considered as a tool to the extension of the president’s executive powers.

AUTHORITARIAN AND POPULIST TRENDS DURING THE PANDEMIC IN THE WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRIES

The transition processes that have taken place in the Western Balkan during the last few decades haven’t proved successful enough especially in terms of achieving consolidated democracies. Despite the countries’ efforts to further push the processes of democratization, authoritarian trends also seem to have gained considerable ground alongside democratization. Different indicators which measure the democratic performance of the countries in the region have shown lower ranks for several years for the most part of the Western Balkans. The following tables evidence such trends.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on the status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. This remark is added by the Editorial Board, and is applicable to all further mentions of Kosovo throughout the paper.

Table 1: Western Balkans' Democracy Score History, Freedom House

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Albania	3.86	3.75	3.82	3.86	3.86	3.86	3.89	3.89	3.82	3.75	3.75
BiH	3.64	3.61	3.57	3.54	3.50	3.46	3.36	3.32	3.32	3.36	3.29
Kosovo*	2.82	2.75	2.86	2.86	2.93	3.04	3.07	3.11	3.18	3.14	3.25
Montenegro	4.18	4.18	4.14	4.11	4.07	4.11	4.07	3.93	3.86	3.82	3.82
N.Macedo- nia	4.11	4.07	4.00	3.93	3.71	3.57	3.64	3.68	3.75	3.82	3.82
Serbia	4.36	4.36	4.36	4.32	4.25	4.18	4.04	4.00	3.96	3.89	3.79

Source: Nations in Transit, Freedom House, 2022

Table 2: Western Balkans' score on EIU Democracy Index 2020, 2021

Country	Overall score 2020	Overall score 2021	Regime type
Albania	6,08	6.11	Flawed democracy
BiH	4.84	5.04	Hybrid regime
North Macedonia	5.89	6.03	Flawed democracy
Montenegro	5.77	6.02	Flawed democracy
Serbia	6.22	6.36	Flawed Democracy

Source: Democracy Index 2020, 'In sickness and in health?', EIU 2021, 2022

Table 3: Worldwide Governance Indicators for the Western Balkans, 2020

Country	Voice and accountability	Political Stability	Rule of Law	Control of Corruption
Albania	51.21	49.53	40.87	31.73
BiH	36.71	27.83	43.27	28.85
Kosovo*	39.61	36.79	38.94	36.54
N. Macedonia	50.24	50.47	52.40	37.98
Montenegro	48.79	47.17	55.29	56.25
Serbia	40.58	43.87	47.60	37.50

Source: Worldwide Governance indicators, World Bank, 2020

As the above latest reports on democracy indicators show, the countries of the Western Balkan have experienced progress in some aspects and setbacks in others. The Economist Intelligence Unit shows that most of the countries of this region experienced a fall compared to 2019, with the exception of Albania which seems to have achieved a slight improvement. A slight positive improvement for all of these countries is achieved in 2021 according to EIU. However, as a matter of fact “the annual index, which provides a measurement of the state of global democracy, reveals an overall score of 5.28, down from 5.37 in 2020” (Economist Intelligence Unit 2022). If we consider a more specific dimension of the democratic performance, the one concerning civic liberties and political rights, the last Freedom House report shows that for “the first time in the 21st century, the prevailing form of governance in the Nations in Transit region is the hybrid regime...and four democracies have fallen into this gray zone since the unbroken period of democratic decline began in 2004: Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia” (Freedom House 2022, 4). According to the same report, in terms of political developments which triggered and led to such scores we can mention, “the parliamentary elections in Serbia dealt a blow, the ousting of Prime Minister Kurti and the formation of a short-lived government”. On the other hand, in Montenegro elections paved the way to a new government, and North Macedonia’s government was reelected.

However, with the coming of the Covid-19 crisis, there is a general expectation that authoritarian trends in political leadership will

be even stronger among countries of this region. “Obviously, the current Covid-19 pandemic presents a new challenge to regimes across the globe. Especially younger democracies, which are characterized by relatively less rigorous checks and balances’ mechanisms found themselves in a dare situation, in which the Covid19 crisis could (and was) misused by illiberal ruling parties to fortify their rule” (Petrović 2020, 52).

The following table shows Bieber’s categorization of authoritarianisms in the Western Balkan countries.

Table 4: Bieber’s types of autocratic rule in the Western Balkans

Country	Type of rule
Montenegro	Continuing change from within
Serbia	Return to semi-authoritarianism
North Macedonia	New semi-authoritarianism
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ethnocratic authoritarianism
Kosovo*	Authoritarianism under international tutelage
Albania	Structural polarization

Source: Bieber (2020, 33-35)

Along with the authoritarian trends which as shown above have gained more ground, populism also seems to be on the rise in this region. Authoritarianism, populism, and exclusionary nationalism have been closely interlinked and often mutually reinforcing (Bonikowski 2017; Jenne 2018). “At the same time, the term populism is almost universally employed to describe a large number of different political phenomena, political actors, policy decisions and regimes that often have little more in common than the label. The growing attention to populism has also increased the pressure on social scientists to come up with clear and easily communicable answers that satisfy the curiosity of people trying to understand the political changes unfolding from the Americas to Europe and beyond” (Heinisch *et al.* 2021, 6).

By referring to the people, populist movements distance themselves from the “old regime” and an interesting such development is with “Self-Determination Movement” (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, LVV, in Albanian) as the main overwhelming political force in Kosovo*. Kurti and the LVV have branded all opposing political parties as “the

old regime” (sometimes “the old guard”) also publicly using terms as “criminals” and “traitors” for their leaders (Hamiti 2021, 153).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about new challenges and insecurities for whole region by thus creating a new environment of the ‘political decision-making’ in conditions of emergency. On the other hand, “emergency politics is a central theme of authoritarian rule. Emergencies have given autocratic leaders the opportunity to destroy or suspend democratic institutions and their checks and balances” (Bieber 2020, 5). With the Covid-19 pandemic which still seems to be pressuring the economic and political systems of the countries worldwide, authoritarianism seems to be on a growing curve in the Western Balkan. “Rosanvallon considers populism as a symptom of the intrinsic malaise of democracy, a perverse inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy and a response to the failure of democratic representation and the transformation of modern society. For all that expressing indignation, denouncing and opposing may make sense, what matters more is to give an answer on the merits. To denounce the authoritarian and illiberal trends of populism convinces only those who are already convinced” (Solios 2020, 203).

In this authoritarian manner of governance is viewed populism in the Western Balkan countries. “The regimes of President Vucic in Serbia, Prime Minister Rama in Albania, until recently Prime Minister Gruevski in North Macedonia, and President (previously PM) Djukanovic in Montenegro, have been classified by many researchers and scholars as clean-cut populism ranging from illiberal democracy to authoritarianism” (Hamiti 2021, 163).

CONCLUSIONS

In the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has been the focus of all the national and international actors by bringing along with the health crises many other challenges for the Western Balkans. The latter have faced multiple challenges in managing the crisis including the economy, the political system, and the society at large.

What can be evidenced from the analysis of the Western Balkan region in terms of democratic performance along with the behavior of the political leadership in managing the health crises during the covid-19 pandemic, is an emphasis of authoritarian and populist trends. Authoritarianism and populism seem to have gained more terrain in this region due to the specificities of power concentration in the executive branch of power.

The political leadership of the six countries of this region took advantage of the emergency measures in the fight against the virus to further concentrate its powers by thus ignoring the democratic decision-making processes and institutions. In the first months of the pandemic, the emergency measures taken strengthened the executives by thus sidelining the legislatives.

“At first glance, it seems as if the weak Western Balkans countries dealt rather successfully with Covid-19 but fell victim to authoritarian tendencies induced by the pandemic. According to a number of think tank and watchdog organizations, crisis management modalities showed serious problems there (including Croatia, a former member of this artificial region)” (Vankovska 2020, 83). The concentration of power with the executive across the region might be temporary, but long-term effects are likely. Firstly, with no clear end to the pandemic in sight, emergency powers might be extended considerably. Secondly, even if this is not the case, there is a risk of the crisis being used by incumbents to consolidate their power and marginalize the already weak opposition in several countries of the region (Bieber *et al.* 2020, 11).

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COVID-19 AND THE MACEDONIAN ELECTIONS 2020/2021: A STORY OF DOUBLE STANDARDS

Abstract

The paper aims to disclose the (de)securitization of Covid-19 during the two Macedonian electoral processes (i.e. the 2020 parliamentary and 2021 local elections) in accordance with the ruling elites' liking. The basic premise is that the pandemic has catalyzed the underlying processes of political alienation and authoritarian tendencies that had been present even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The safety rules and regulations during the pandemic have been repeatedly re-modeled and manipulated in accordance with both economic and political gain's 'logic' rather than led by medical reasons and health protection requirements. The Macedonian politics of power-sharing is a case in focus, and it offers convincing arguments that political, ethnic, and religious elites have used the pandemic for their own interest and holding to power at any cost.

Keywords: elections, democracy, Covid-19, (de)securitization, political elites

INTRODUCTION

Two years after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is enough empirical material to come to some conclusions about electoral democracy in a time of (health) crisis. This paper focuses on the two electoral events and how the Macedonian political elites used the health

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security arguments in their (pre)electoral activities and performances – i.e. the 2020 parliamentary elections and 2021 local elections.

At a glance, it appears as if there have been two different phases of electoral democracy that differ hugely if seen through the prism of (de)securitization of the pandemic by the political parties. In short, the electoral ‘logic’ in time of health crisis has shifted from calls for elections postponement due to the alleged life-threatening health risks (in spring 2020) to calls for speedy elections (in late 2021 and early 2022). This attitude is particularly visible with the political opposition. On the other hand, the ruling coalition has been insisting on its allegedly successful managing of the pandemic and providing a safe environment for the voters during the electoral process, while dismissing the calls for early elections because of the general crisis in the country that requires a stable government rather than going to the ballot boxes soon.

The paper proceeds in four parts. In the first, we deal with the theoretical framework of analysis that practically combines political and security considerations of the elections in times of crisis. The focal point is on the concept of securitization and desecuritization, which is then applied to the Covid-19 environment and its political ramification. The second part of the article sets the nexus of elections and (de)securitization of the pandemic in the Macedonian political context. The following two sections deal with the specificities of each electoral cycle of 2020 and 2021, respectively. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of this analysis for the way we think about the performative effects of security representations and the conditions in which exceptional practices become possible during the election process.

(DE)SECURITIZATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The concept of securitization, a staple of the Copenhagen school of security studies, postulates that security is a speech act. In other words, security is not necessarily an objective condition. Also, it does not have a positive or negative value *per se*. Any issue that can successfully be enunciated as an existential threat to something (a referent object) by securitizing agents (elites and/or those in a position to make their voices heard) may be removed from the political realm and defined as a security issue, thereby helping reproduce the hierarchical conditions and measures that characterize security practices. Once something is securitized, then normal/political mindset and actions are replaced by security concerns and extraordinary protection measures can be imposed. Barry Buzan, Ole

Waever, and Jaap de Wilde (1998, 23-24) argue that “security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue (...) as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure. [...] Something is designated as an international security issue because it can be argued that this issue is more important than other issues and should take absolute priority [...] that the issue is presented as an existential threat”. *Vice versa*, ‘de-securitization’ means that an issue is not, or no longer, seen/conceptualized in terms of security; instead, security simply becomes an irrelevant concern (although it may indeed *still* represent an existential threat). The de-securitization process implies ‘less security, more politics!’ (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 45). Or policies, one could add to this. It may also imply a total disregard of a (possibly) real threat for different reasons. During the pandemic, de-securitization has led to an extreme situation where other burning issues (such as, for instance, the migrant crisis, famine, or curable diseases) vanish from the radar screens as if they were not important or even never existed.

Indeed, while COVID-19 has been securitized very quickly, there is an ongoing political struggle over the right narrative of COVID-19 and the responses it has elicited, notably around the question: security for whom? (Sears 2020). Attempts to frame the pandemic as a threat common to humanity have proved a losing battle as national security has overshadowed the humanist approach. The well-being of one’s own population/State is *the* dominant referent object of (health) security. Both securitizing and de-securitizing processes are largely in the hands of national elites. No wonder political leaders (Donald Trump, Emmanuel Macron, Xi Jinping, Giuseppe Conte and even then Macedonian caretaker Prime Minister Oliver Spasovski, to mention just a few) used war-like rhetoric against the invisible enemy. Conversely, authoritarian leaders, such as Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro or Belarus’ Alexander Lukashenko, have dismissed the threat and ignored the pandemic, i.e. they have de-securitized the threat, in a most extreme case (Turkmenistan), even banished the word from their vocabulary.

The tension between securitizing and de-securitizing agents has only added to the general confusion: the former usually yield to exaggeration, while the latter downplay the risks. Interestingly, States (supported by mainstream media, experts, and other influential groups in each society) could be seen on both sides of the fence. At the peak of the crisis, the public policy measures included not only recommendations on social distancing, hygiene, closing down schools and other public and business activities, but also lockdown, curfew, and data tracking

applications – some of which implied certain limitations or even violations of basic human rights and freedoms. As soon as the costs of lockdown proved unbearable for business interests and the economy in general, public authorities started to reverse course. They did so in manners (dubbed “gaslighting”, after a theatre play of the same name, and to the same effect) that gave citizens a sense of being manipulated into doubting their own sanity. Theoretically, a securitization dilemma appears when securitizing one issue in one sector negatively impacts another sector, which creates a dilemma for the securitizers as to whether they should securitize the issue or not. Although not fully developed as a theoretical concept, “gaslighting” refers to a process whereby the securitizer figures out that the costs of securitization measures are too high, so that a turnaround recommends itself through mere psychological propaganda and PR manipulation. This implies that the public is to be blamed if it wrongly understood the threat as an existential one while it was not the case (i.e. there was no reason for securitization in the first place, and even if there was – now it’s over and should be forgotten).

The scholarly debate over COVID-19, which has become a central part of the political process of securitization/de-securitization, is contested and removed from the ‘normal health public policy’ domain. Instead it is made an intrinsic part of security policy, or later used as a persuasion ploy at the end of the lockdown period. Julio Vincent Gambuto (2020) anticipated the shift from securitization to de-securitization and *vice versa*. In an article published in mid-April 2020, which went viral within hours, he warned readers to “prepare for the ultimate gaslighting, arguing that [...] pretty soon, as the country begins to figure out how we ‘open back up’ and move forward, very powerful forces will try to convince us all to get back to normal. (That never happened. What are you talking about?). Billions of dollars will be spent on advertising, messaging, and television and media content to make you feel comfortable again.”

It did not take long after the official proclamation of the pandemic by WHO for the governments to raise the health risks to the level of existential threat. Dealing with it demanded not only swift responses and a sense of urgency but also some extraordinary measures to be undertaken by the political and health authorities. Several studies offer insight in how the process has been unfolding in various countries (Vankovska 2020a; Molnár et al 2020; Nunes 2020; Kirk and McDonald 2021). Covid-19 helped State triumphantly return to the scene through biopolitics, or better biopolitics understood as governmentality (Foucault 2003). Giorgio Agamben (Foucault *et al.* 2020) scandalized many by warning against

the manifest tendency to use a state of exception as a normal paradigm for the government.

At the same time, political elites hide their incompetence and ineptness behind the authority of the ‘white coats’ of medical and paramedical staff or special crisis HQs. The pandemic has not only concealed the deeper causes of the ongoing crisis of capitalism, but it has also suspended any critical (and radical – grassroots) rethinking of reality in the name of humanitarian and ethical ideals. At the same time, the pandemic serves as an excuse for anything that does not/did not go well in the way the State functions. War-like rhetoric has proven convenient for boosting one’s political legitimacy and for imposing mass control more easily but also for personalization of power, which also impacts the internal politics and electoral process. The securitization campaign run by the government, especially when the fear was in the raise, contributed to enhancing popular support of the political leadership in general. Thus, the issue of the pandemic has been used for internal political purposes as well.

THE MACEDONIAN COUNTRY BACKGROUND AT THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

According to the Copenhagen school’s sectorial approach, there are five interlinked sectors of security: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental one. The idea is that insecurity from one sector may spill over into another, and at the end to create a vicious circle, which is hard to break out. At first sight, it seems that the health care does not fit in any of them – yet, the deeper inspection shows that the population’s health is essential and dependent on the state of affairs in all of them. For instance, more investment into military sector, leads to insufficient funds for health care and other public services; dissatisfaction with the public policies and services leads to political instability; the political instability may influence the political leaders to distract the public opinion and discover an ‘enemy’ into the Other (other ethnic or religious group); a state in political and economic disarray does not care about the environment, which creates a backlash for all the other sectors. However, Wenham (2019) argues that health and security have been increasingly interrelated through narratives that are now embedded in the health security discourse. Floyd (2019) goes further by introducing Just Securitization Theory in the context of which she argues that issues such as the pandemics not only justify securitizations, but necessitate them (Floyd 2021). Due to the focus on the elections, we would not go

further into the debate that has bourgeoned in the recent years. The key point is that securitization of the Covid-19 pandemic does not prove its superiority over the so-called normal politics (and health policy, in this very case). Regardless the seriousness of the disease (this one or any other in the future), it is the politics that is expected to provide a solid and efficient system of health protection instead of commodifying and privatizing somethings that serves the entire society.

The theoretical framework of (de)securitization is quite useful in elaborating the recent Macedonian history, which has seen military clash, perpetual political instability, ethnic divisions, economic stagnation and environmental degradation. Interestingly, the moment the country's leadership thought it had achieved absolute (military) security by joining NATO in March 2020, which was expected to increase the wellbeing – another non-military threat became imminent. The pandemic in a way showed how overrated was everything that had been done for the sake of military security.

Since 2020, the governments in most of the countries in the world have had to confront the dilemma of how to reconcile the democratic governance principles (or at least their governing position) with the imperative of providing mass health protection during the pandemic. The elections are seen as a hallmark of democracy but in many cases (such as the Macedonian one) where substantive democracy is missing, it is the elections that create a mirage of vivid political life. Certain studies have argued that electoral democracies have better health than other nations (Patterson and Veenstra 2016). Yet the Covid-19 pandemic has dispelled such beliefs in many developed countries. Neoliberalism has shown all its deficiencies with regard to the collective good and social services, which had already been commercialized. During the first wave of the pandemic, many states opted for a postponement of the already scheduled elections (or referenda) (IDEA 2020). Seen through a scholarly prism, one could argue that there has been sparse academic literature on election postponement (James and Alihodzic 2020).

The Covid-19 outbreak in early March 2020 found the Macedonian state in a specific political situation: the protracted political crisis had called for snap parliamentary elections as soon as possible in the fall of 2019. In accordance with the legislative adopted during the so-called Colored Revolution of 2016, the parliament had already been dissolved. The caretaker government had a limited mandate – only to organize the elections. The only institution in full capacity was the President of the Republic who had been sitting in office for less than a year.

The roots of the political deadlock should be tracked back to 2018/2019 when the country changed its constitutional name for the sake of NATO and EU membership. The so-called Prespa process (i.e. the adoption of the name change agreement and controversial constitutional revision) shook Macedonian society seriously. The intra – and inter-ethnic divisions as well as the worrisome political polarization deepened utterly. The name change was a gamble for the then prime minister Zoran Zaev, who publicly admitted that he played “all in” – hoping that the political risks and sacrifice would pay off (Vankovska 2020b). The road to NATO (military security provider) looked straight and clear, but the conclusions of the October summit of the EU (i.e. expected social wellbeing) left PM Zaev high and dry. Instead of opening the association talks with Albania and N. Macedonia, President Macron proposed a new methodology, thus giving a cold shoulder to the leadership of the two candidate countries. Having been a darling of the West and going against the people’s will in his country¹, Zaev seemed to be cornered and decided to offer his resignation and call for early elections.

Actually, snap elections had been in cards in either case: if newly renamed Macedonia had been given a green light to start the accession talks, the ruling coalition would have taken advantage of the elections; in the opposite case – the threat of possible government’s resignation was expected to make Brussels and Washington more responsive to the cries from Skopje (as the political opposition was portrayed as a cause for the ‘captive state’ replaced during the colored revolution in 2016/2017). No wonder the electoral campaign had been underway even before the summit of the European Council. It seemed that the country was looking forward to going on elections – the first one after signing the Prespa Agreement and the constitutional name change that proved highly divisive and legally dubious.

1 The Macedonian government called a referendum with respect to the name change (Prespa agreement). It was held on 30 September 2018. Despite a vigorous PRO campaign, the vast majority of the citizens decided not to vote, or rather to boycott it. The results of the referendum were disastrous for the Government: only 36 percent of the voters cared to cast a vote. The constitutional requirement (50+1 %) was not met, and the State Electoral Commission stated that the referendum failed. It is also important to stress that the Macedonian constitution does not recognize a non-binding referendum, while the Law on Referendum stipulates that a consultative referendum over an international agreement is possible but prior to its signing. In this case, the Government signed the agreement with Greece in secrecy, and only afterward asked the electorate for a non-binding opinion. In sum, the referendum was just a show. In spite of the popular vote, the government embarked on the constitutional revision, a process marred with a vast number of irregularities for the sake of gaining a 2/3 majority vote in the Parliament.

Instead, just like the entire world, the country had to deal with the unexpected pandemic in the worst possible political moment. The internal tensions were running high, and the Western allies did not even try to make PM Zaev reconsider his decision. He believed he had been too useful and precious, with the opposition portrayed as a political threat that would lead to a revision of the Prespa agreement. However, it did not take long for everyone to become too preoccupied with the pandemic-related issues, and with one's own national interests. Ever since EU and NATO *de facto* disappointed many of its candidate countries, especially in the so-called Western Balkans due to the obvious lack of solidarity.

Once the ruling coalition between the Social Democrats (SDSM) and the Albanian leading party DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) realized that it should deal with the challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by themselves, the focus was on taking measures to address a major health emergency. At the same time, they had to continue preparing for the elections whenever scheduled. The country had already been in a very difficult position: over-indebted and with a health system in disarray. The fact is that the governments had always been more confident that NATO and EU membership would automatically change things for the better, but the country had been shaken by corruption scandals and failed internal reforms.

THE FIRST PANDEMIC ELECTIONS: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2020

The electoral rules imposed by the so-called Pržino agreement (i.e. the agreement sponsored by the EU to overcome the political crisis during the Colorful Revolution) and the subsequent changes of the legislation would not allow snap elections before a caretaker government took office (European Commission 2015).² Thus Zaev's resignation was followed by the formation of the transition government (3 January 2020) and dissolution of the Parliament in mid-February 2020. The election date was originally set for 12 April 2020. The ruling coalition had an intention to confirm its legitimacy after the painful Prespa moment at a time when the country would get the first visible gain – i.e. the full membership in

2 Eventually, the Pržino Agreement was implemented through the change of the Law on the Government through amendments that stipulated that 100 days ahead of the new elections there will be a technical or transitional Government. It would include the representatives of the opposition in a few key ministries. The provisions from 2016 are still in force as there is no parliamentary consensus (2/3 majority vote) for abandoning these "crisis-related" provisions, which implies deep distrust among the political parties.

NATO – in March 2020. The country’s formal membership took place in an atmosphere that was hardly celebratory amidst Covid-19 induced fears and tight lockdowns.

The power vacuum created with the dissolution of the Parliament was immediately fulfilled by the executive rule under the state of emergency. Following the all-party consent, the state of emergency was declared, and the elections postponed.³ The interlude was an additional test for Macedonian democracy and human rights understanding. The pandemic also shifted the political mood and the citizens’ priorities: hence, the elections were not so much about the grand national/identity issues that had troubled the country in the pre-pandemic period and turned to human security issues (such as people’s health and security).

One could say that the ruling coalition benefited from the pandemic in several ways: first, the ultimate concern of the citizens was the life protection from what was seen as a terrifying infectious disease – and everything else withered away; second, despite the strict lockdowns and violations of human rights, the then minister of health (a professor and medical doctor, Venko Filipče) became the most popular and trustful politician;⁴ third, the disciplinary power and biopolitics helped the ruling elite strengthen its rather weak position due to the autocratic political culture among the citizens (Sahin and Tsonev 2020, 18);⁵ fourth, the Covid-19 pandemic displayed the game of (ethnic and religious) double standards in a consociational democracy – the strict rules that applied to one part of the population were overtly disrespected by the other (mostly visible during Ramadan posts) with no legal responsibility whatsoever (Božinovski and Nikolovski 2021), and fifth, the state of emergency put at test not only constitutional principles of separation of power but also the human rights protection, non-discrimination and accountability of the executive.

3 The opposition leader Mickovski called the President of the Republic to immediately declare a state of emergency because the “situation was alarming”. At that point, there were only 35 Covid-related deaths (Netpress 2020).

4 According to some media reports, the health minister got public support of fantastic 80 percent of the public opinion. See: Trpkovski G. 2020 „Koronata i prinudnoto zreenje na političkata klasa“, *Prizma*, 16 September, available at <https://prizma.mk/koronata-i-prinudnoto-zreene-na-politichkata-klasa/> (accessed on 26 March 2022).

5 The “V-Dem Institute” from Götheborg listed Macedonia among the 48 countries at the highest risk of sliding into authoritarianism thanks to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. See: Lührmann A. et al 2020, “Pandemic Backsliding: Does Covid-19 Put Democracy at Risk?” Policy Brief No. #23, V-Dem Institute: Gothenburg, available at https://www.vdem.net/media/filer_public/52/eb/52eb913a-b1ad-4e55-9b4b-3710ff70d1bf/pb_23.pdf, accessed on 25 March 2022.

As already said, the only institution with full political and legal capacity at the time was the President of the Republic. He was the only one who could and did declare (for the first time in the history of independent Macedonia) a state of emergency. The Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences issued a report on the legal aspects of the state of emergency, which detected many deficiencies in the constitutional arrangement (MANU 2020).⁶ The Law Faculty's staff also had much to say about the constitutional and legal deficiencies in regulating the state of emergency (Praven fakultet 2020), but also concerning the violations of the Electoral Law during the respected period (Karakamiševa-Jovanovska 2020). Although constitutionally limited to a period of maximum of 30 days, through an arbitrary extension the state of emergency lasted from 18 March up to 22 June 2020. Formally, the pandemic fitted well into Article 125, referring to "epidemics" *inter alia*.⁷ The real reason however was not so much in the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic but rather in the fact that there was no other possibility to postpone the elections but also to give the government free reign in various spheres. During this period, the Government issued 250 decrees with the force of law (Ministerstvo za pravda 2021). Very few of them had direct relevance for the *raison d'être* of the state of emergency – i.e. coping with the pandemic.

One of the first decrees of the caretaker government, therefore, referred to the already launched electoral process. It determined that the electoral activities would be suspended during the state of emergency, while the State Electoral Commission's term in office was extended for six months (Vlada 2020). The declaration of the state of emergency displayed not only the lacuna in the constitutional arrangements but also the weakness of the institutions (particularly the ones that are entitled in the field of crisis management) as well as the real threats to human rights protection. Against the opinions of some constitutional and legal

6 The MANU's team took a stand that the Parliament could have and should have been 'revived' despite the legal dissolution adopted under Article 63 of the Constitution. The Constitutional court did not overrule this act, while the legal experts remained with opposite positions concerning the issue.

7 Article 125 of the Macedonian Constitution reads: "A state of emergency exists when major natural disasters or epidemics take place. A state of emergency on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia or on part thereof is determined by the Assembly on a proposal by the President of the Republic, the Government or by at least 30 Representatives. The decision to establish the existence of a state of emergency is made by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Representatives and can remain in force for a maximum of 30 days. If the Assembly cannot meet, the decision to establish the existence of a state of emergency is made by the President of the Republic, who submits it to the Assembly for confirmation as soon as it can meet."

experts who argued the opposite, the President of the Republic extended the state of emergency on three more occasions consecutively.⁸ The end of the pandemic was nowhere in sight, so he publicly admitted that the extension of the state of emergency was not due to health concerns (as the Constitution requires) but because of economic and financial needs (getting loans and credits to secure state's functioning). The pandemic affected the citizens' well-being and the economy harshly. The government, ruling by decrees, *de facto* got an extra opportunity to present itself as the ultimate guardian of the people's needs. According to the opposition the social packages bore effectively elements of pre-electoral corruption.

Concerning the new date of the elections, the government and the opposition took different stands. While the ruling elites insisted on elections sooner rather than later, the opposition was resolute that health conditions were not appropriate and insisted on further postponement. Thus the main opposition party (VMRO-DPMNE) had also been playing the Covid-19 card in the pre-election period in an attempt to emphasize the voters' safety as the ultimate priority, accusing the government of power-greediness and risking the lives for the sake of their political benefit. VMRO-DPMNE's leader, Mickoski threatened that the opposition would not participate in elections if they were set before July 15. In his view, that was the earliest acceptable date, so that the country could prepare for the polls amid an allegedly "rampant COVID-19 outbreak". In reality, however, the Covid-19 related data showed a rather acceptable situation. From today's perspective, it is quite clear that the situation in summer 2020 was far brighter than the one in fall 2021 or today.

The election results were tight as expected, thus there was no big surprise in the tight margin of votes for the ruling and opposition parties. Yet the governing position was of great advantage in the time of the pandemic. The state elites presented themselves as saviours and could manipulate the various social packages for support of the vulnerable groups. What used to be a big problem of pre-electoral corruption of the electorate, now got a new dimension of 'acceptable and necessary' care for the disadvantaged citizens. In the pre-election period, the government played the card of allegedly great success in dealing with the health crisis and even claimed that it achieved a 'victory' over the pandemic. The ruling parties faced accusations of prematurely scrapping Covid-19 movement restrictions to legitimize their push for early elections, whether the health situation in the country warrants the move or not. The elections

8 The last extension was for only eight days to fit with the timetable of electoral activities, which were set in order for the elections to be held on 15 July 2020.

were again presented as normal and safe events. The turnout was 52,02 (i.e. down roughly 15 percentage points) – the citizens did not feel really motivated to risk their lives (as it was perceived at the moment) for the sake of a new government made of the old and well-known (and disrespected) elites. The results coincided with the prognosis in the public opinion polls (MCMS 2020).

The ruling coalition of SDSM and a few Albanian political parties managed to preserve the majority in the parliament but with huge difficulties. The constitutive session of the new government was marred by a scandal that later on became a normal phenomenon: a Covid-positive MP was allowed in the parliament building to vote from a separate cabin. That precedent was followed by a few more cases of MPs in protective suits, both from the ruling coalition and the opposition. What was at first named ‘bioterrorism’ eventually has become a regular behavior under the parliament’s Covid protocols. The politically necessary move to enable the parliament’s work and the existence of the weak government only showed how privileged the politicians are in a time of crisis.

The entire political management of the pandemic especially in its early months shows governance without any scientifically or medically solid ground and logic because the public was bewildered between oscillating good and terrifying news and measures. The Covid-19 pandemic (as anything else in today’s world) was securitized or de-securitized in accordance with pure political (party) calculations as well as economic concerns. Depending on the political conjuncture, the Covid-19 nightmare was either coming to its end or on the contrary – the political elites used fearmongering to preserve the submissive position of the exhausted and impoverished citizens.

THE SECOND PANDEMIC ELECTIONS: THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Almost 15 months after the parliamentary elections, the country was set to go on local elections. A brief prelude to these elections was an episode related to mayoral elections in the city of Štip and the municipality of Plasnica in December 2020 (for a mandate of less than a year). Namely, the existing majors became MPs during the parliamentary elections, on the side of the ruling SDSM. The opposition (VMRO-DPMNE and the other smaller parties) decided to boycott them using the securitization discourse of the Covid-19 risks: “The elections will be neither fair nor democratic, let alone safe. And one human life lost due to this complex operation, will be a sufficient reason not to enter

into a dangerous adventure.” (Republika 2020). Indeed Štip was one of the cities most affected by the Covid-19 crisis, and with the largest number of infections in the eastern part of the country. The turnout was so low that the threshold of 33 percent was hardly met. According to the opposition and some media reports, the elections were marred by irregularities and bribery, but the sharpest criticism concerned the disrespect for the Covid-19 protocols, especially during the celebratory post-electoral events.

The country’s local elections were constitutionally and legally fixed for the fall of 2021. Thus there was not much maneuvering space for scheduling the poll’s date, especially as the President of the Republic and the Government excluded any possibility of declaring a state of emergency. At a glance, the political parties and the voters seemed to have got familiar with the ‘new normal’ and the pandemic ill records (i.e. the extremely high death toll) did not affect the regular political processes, including the campaign and the election act.

The government used the prelude of the local elections for pushing one more (political and ethnic) goal: the census was to be carried out in September 2021, after two decades of suspension. At the moment the results are still not publicly declared but it is a fact that many citizens boycotted the operation using the Covid-19 risks and allegedly not suitable protocols as an excuse. The reasons should be sought in the political and ethnic deal between the ruling Macedonian and Albanian parties, i.e. in the ‘logic’ of power-sharing governance in what is becoming a bi-national state. However, the Covid-related security discourse was again amply used by the opposition. The media reported that “the census took Macedonia one step closer to the top for the highest mortality from Covid-19” (TV Telma 2021). Although the pandemic consequences were highly detrimental, one could hardly make a correlation between the census implementation (and for the same reason, the elections) and the death toll, especially bearing in mind the poor response of the overall state and health system. Several highly esteemed professors of medicine have been talking in vain about all the deficiencies of the Covid-19 response, such as the lack of competent medical staff, equipment, and unified treatment protocols at the primary medical level.

Having sensed that the political mood is swinging in its favor, the opposition (highly critical regarding the census and all other government policies) was looking forward to going out on elections. The party that used to be so concerned about the health protocols and safety of the voters this time insisted on an introduction of a technical novelty: biometric fingerprint readers were introduced to secure the regularity of the election

process. The unprepared electoral administration and the technical difficulties caused long delays in the electoral places, where people were waiting in line to cast their votes. Weeks ahead of the elections, the government also decided to relax the restriction measures, especially in terms of public gatherings both outdoors and indoors. The media reported that the battle against Covid-19 took a back seat for the sake of the ongoing power battle. In short, desecuritization reigned over the fears and risks.

The opposition achieved a landslide victory in the local elections that were hardly focused on matters of local significance. Covid-19 was (just) one of the key issues of the debate. Not only the country has got on the top list of states with the highest death-toll, but also other consequences of the badly managed crises took their political toll. The lack of any political or moral responsibility, even for a fire of a modular hospital in Tetovo that left 14 victims, was probably the last drop in the already full glass. Even the analysts close to the ruling party came to the conclusion that the highest Covid-19 mortality rate in Europe, corruption scandals involving high-ranking government officials, the fire in the modular hospital and the consequent refusal by Zaev to accept the resignation of health minister Filipče, make the top of the list of such factors that created a cumulative effect that came to its downpour in the form of the dramatically decreased support for SDSM in the local elections. Eventually, Zaev's successor has inherited a 'perfect storm' of national and local problems, where it is almost impossible to detect what is a cause and what is a consequence of the bad governance encompassed by the ongoing health crisis.

Prime Minister Zaev invested all his political capital in the local elections. In a gambler's manner, he again tried to motivate the electorate to give him (his party) unreserved support by offering his resignation if he loses the elections in the capital city of Skopje. At the end of the election's day he publicly announced his resignation as prime minister as well as a leader of the Social Democrats. New PM Kovačevski is a total anonymous to the Macedonian public and it is hard to say what to expect from his government, but if the early days in office indicate anything it is that his policy would be a follow-up of Zaev's in his focus on external problems (i.e. the identity dispute with Bulgaria as an obstacle in EU integration) rather than on the accumulated internal ones, including the ravaging Omicron wave. As already mentioned, the prognosis is that he may be enforced to go on early elections, as the government is hardly sticking together.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: PANDEMIC BETWEEN SECURITIZATION AND NORMALIZATION

The period of two years is too short to make any definite conclusions regarding the electoral democracy under pandemic. Pandemocracy in N. Macedonia, as in many other countries, posed an exceptional challenge to the political elites and the citizens. The analysis of the two electoral processes (in 2020 and 2021) shows that no matter how dramatic the impact of Covid-19 on the Macedonian society and polity was/is, the pandemic only exposed the already existing fractures and incapacities of the state institutions and the regulations. The elections have not changed anything, and it seems that the Covid-19 pandemic has been used as a trump card whenever it was possible and for benefit of the party elites. Their policies did not change, as the rampant corruption goes on in all spheres including the health sector. The party and ethnic divisions grow deeper and no elections under no circumstances may heal these ruptures.

The issue of holding elections has gone through a process of ‘normalization’, i.e. living with the enemy/security threat (Covid-19) in the long run. In early 2022 the country few talk about Covid-19, despite the extremely high death-toll and failure of the entire health system. At the time being, the Republic of N. Macedonia copes with three simultaneous ‘crisis situations’ (i.e. states of exception) vis-à-vis migrant crisis, health crisis and energy crisis.⁹ These formally declared “state of crisis” create the societal and political environment in which the political actors engage in an effort to stay or get into power. The gradual acceptance of the Covid-19 risks pushes away the existential threats to human lives (in case this pandemic worsens, or another life-threatening disease appears), which means this type of security menace has been desecuritized. There are almost no lessons learned, which is visible from the unchanged public health policies. Now the attention has switched to regular political games – and to the looming war in Ukraine.

One would expect an extraordinary event like the pandemic to make conditions for overcoming the differences in the society and the political arena for the sake of the common good, but instead, the pandemic has been a time for a sort of ‘war profiteering’ for the sake of business interests, deeper privatization and political gains. Some experts argue that the pandemic calls not for great leaders but for organization, protocols and strategies, collective management – it is all that a weak state as the Macedonian one is unable to provide. The constant political battles and

⁹ At the time of writing the article, the country also faces a security crisis induced by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

electoral victories do not bring any improvement in the lives of ordinary citizens and eventually may prove Pyric if the population suffers from other existential threats.

Apparently, the elites have adjusted to the pandemic, while the electoral democracy becomes again a ‘business as usual’ – with no concerns about the price paid by human lives and insecurities due to the bad public policies. Some authors argue that securitization, with its added sense of urgency, is not the ideal context to create and alter security politics in any sector. While it may hold some truth, yet the opposite process of desecuritization (especially when the risks have diminished) should create an atmosphere conducive for seeking better policies and protocols in case the threat (of the pandemic) gets back. The theory of securitization and desecuritization does not apply only to socially constructed threats; on the contrary! The covid-19 pandemic has been a real threat with huge loss of human lives, but the securitizing agents (the government elites, the opposition, the media, etc.) have been playing both ways, by securitizing or desecuritizing the disease in accordance with their current needs in the power game. (De)securitization has no value per se, and the real effects depend on how the securitizing agents manage the real (or imagine) threats. This paper demonstrates that the electoral victory could be a very powerful motive to use this process for the sake of one’s own political gain.

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COVID-19 AND ELECTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Abstract

When COVID-19 pandemic was announced in March 2020, North Macedonia was in the middle of the electoral process, with a dissolved Parliament and a few days before the start of the electoral campaign. The elections were postponed because the threats of the virus were unpredictable and the strategy to handle it was unknown. Instead of April 2020, the elections were held in July 2020. The changes of the Electoral Code were adopted in order to introduce procedures for voting that would be safe for voters and electoral boards. Also changes of the rules for electoral campaign were made in order to adapt the forms of campaigning to the “new COVID-19 reality”. This article analyzes the effects of Covid-19 on the parliamentary elections in North Macedonia in 2020, focusing on the changes on the electoral rules and the electoral campaigning because of COVID-19, as well as the influence of COVID-19 on the turnout of voters. The context of the postponement of the elections, institutional setting and legal solutions are analyzed in the first part of the article. The changes of the rules regarding campaigning and adaptation of political actors to new rules are analyzed in the second part of the article. The third part focuses on the changes of voting procedures and adaptation of electoral management bodies. The last part of the article points to the changes of other rules, mostly on financing and misuse of state resources.

Keywords: elections, COVID-19, electoral campaign, electoral rules, voter turnout, North Macedonia

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge for many aspects of people's lives and functioning of the states. Not only was the health of people attacked by the virus, but democracy was also endangered. Governments implemented many restrictions on human rights. Most of the governments considered that it was not possible to hold elections during the pandemic. "Elections postponed due to the outbreak of COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) span the globe...at least 80 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone national and subnational elections due to COVID-19" (Idea 2022).

After the first "shock" caused by the coronavirus disease, the governments and electoral bodies around the globe started adapting electoral rules to the new circumstances in order to conduct elections. So, COVID-19 did not only change the calendar of elections, but also the rules for conducting elections. Countries made efforts to make elections more "voter friendly" in search of innovative ways to preserve in-person democratic participation. Some countries succeeded to keep the voter turnout same or even to increase the turnout on the elections that were held after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, compared to the previous elections, but in most of the countries (66% of the countries that held elections in 2020-2021) the turnout declined (Idea 2022).

North Macedonia was not an exception of general trends of change of electoral rules and turnout during elections held in and after 2020. But also, there were some specifics, especially in the campaign financing, voting and voter identification. The specifics of electoral process in 2020 in North Macedonia are analyzed in this article, especially how COVID-19 impacted electoral rules' change, electoral campaigning and voter turnout in North Macedonia. The first part of the article presents the context of elections in 2020, the procedures for their postponement, institutional settings and legal solutions that were implemented. The second part of the article explains changes of the rules regarding campaigning and adaptation of political actors to new rules. The third part of the article presents the changes of rules on voting procedures and adaptation of election management bodies and the last part analyses the changes of other rules, mostly on financing and misuse of state resources.

COVID-19 AS A REASON FOR POSTPONING APRIL 2020 EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, North Macedonia underwent two electoral processes – one parliamentary and one local. Both electoral cycles had specifics that were necessary because of health restrictions and measures and for both elections, electoral rules were modified in order to incorporate a possibility for the implementation of these health restrictions and measures.

Even more, when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020, North Macedonia was in the middle of the electoral process, with a dissolved Parliament and few days before the start of the electoral campaign. On March 12, 2020, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a Decision for preventing the spread of the virus COVID-19. This decision contained 15 different measures, among which the prohibition of public gatherings and all events, both outdoors and indoors. That meant that electoral campaign, as it was defined in the Electoral Code, could not take place.

According to the legislation, 100 days before parliamentary elections, the caretaker Government is elected, with many restrictions in the competencies. In this Government, opposition nominates the Minister of Interior and Minister of Labor and Social Care as well as three Deputy Ministers (in the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Administration and Informatics). So, in March 2020 caretaker Government was already in power in North Macedonia and the elections were called for 12th April 2020. Faced with the new disease, a lot of unknown aspects and a lot of horrifying photos from Italian hospitals, the President of the Republic proposed that April early parliamentary elections should be postponed, which all political parties agreed to. However, they did not agree on the legal procedure for postponing elections, so the President of the Republic called a meeting of legal experts to discuss the possible procedure for that. During the expert discussions, the constitutional provisions according to which, the Parliament dissolves itself and no other body has competence to call or dissolve the Parliament, were considered. Also, according to the Constitution, all elections, including parliamentary, are scheduled by the President of the Parliament. In the case of early parliamentary elections, they must be held in the period of 60 days after the dissolution of the Parliament. In February 2020, the Parliament decided to dissolve itself before the termination of its mandate and the President of the Parliament

issued the decision for the date of the elections. So, the main question was if the Parliament could be recalled after its dissolution.

During the legal debate that took place on March 17, 2020, two proposals were formulated. The first one was the Government to submit proposal for declaration of state of emergency to the Parliament, which could be used as the initial act for recalling the Parliament. This option was refused by the President of the Parliament and opposition with the argument that a dissolved Parliament cannot be recalled. I presume that real motives of the opposition for refusing this proposal, was their intention to hold position of Ministry of Interior longer, because they feared that if the Parliament had been called, the caretaker Government would have been replaced by the political government, till the new agreement for the day of elections. So, in their interest was to postpone the elections, while holding the positions in the caretaker Government.

As far as the legal frame is considered, the Constitution does not contain the explicit provision on this question. The Article 63 paragraph 4 of the Constitution regulates that the mandate of the MPs can be prolonged only in state of war or state of emergency. In 2016, the Constitutional Court in its Decision No. 104/2016-1 explained that “the mandate of the MPs cannot be prolonged in the case of dissolution of the Parliament, outside of the conditions determined in the Article 63 paragraph 4 of the Constitution” (Constitutional Court 2016).

Because the first proposal was refused by the President of the Parliament and the opposition, the second proposal was the president of the Republic to declare state of emergency, which would give opportunity to the Government to adopt a decree with force of law that would provide postponement of the elections. According to the Constitution, a state of emergency can be declared on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia or on a part of it. As justification for declaring a state of emergency, the Constitution regulates that “a state of emergency exists when major natural disasters or epidemics take place.” A state of emergency is declared by the Assembly by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Representatives of the Assembly, on the proposal of the President of the Republic, the Government or at least 30 Representatives. If the Assembly cannot meet, the decision on the declaration of a state of war is made by the President of the Republic who submits it to the Assembly for confirmation as soon as it can meet.

The decision to establish the existence of a state of emergency can remain in force for a maximum of 30 days.

The Constitution regulates that during a state of war or emergency, the Government, in accordance with the Constitution and law, issues

decrees with the force of law. The authorization of the Government to issue decrees with the force of law lasts until the termination of the state of war or emergency, on which the Assembly decides.

So, on March 18, 2020, the Government adopted a decision to propose a declaration of emergency situation to the Parliament. This proposal was sent to the President of the Parliament, who forwarded the proposal to the President of the Republic, explaining that the Parliament was dissolved and could not be assembled to decide for the proposal of the Government. The same day, the President of the Republic declared a state of emergency. On of March 23, 2020, the Decree with force of law regulating questions of election process was adopted by the Government. This Decree with force of law regulated that all electoral activities were to be stopped, and that they were to continue after the state of emergency had been terminated. All electoral activities that were already taken would be valid. The State Electoral Commission was obliged to keep all documents connected with early parliamentary elections and one day after the state of emergency would be terminated to publish on its web-page revised timetable for the rest of the electoral activities. Another problem that raised was that the mandate of the members of the State Electoral Commission was till June 2020 and nobody could predict at that time when the elections would be held. Because the members of the State Electoral Commission were elected by the Parliament and their mandate was regulated by the Electoral Code, the Government regulated in the Decree with legal force that the mandate of the members of the State Electoral Commission would be extended and would last six months after the day of elections. This period of six months was provided to provide opportunity for the process of election of a new Government to finish, since the ruling political parties and the political parties from the opposition are represented with different number of members in the State Electoral Commission. So, it was important to know which political parties are on power and which in opposition in order to elect new State Electoral Commission according to the provisions of the Electoral Code.

Also, the Decree suspended the application of the provisions of the Electoral Code during a state of emergency, especially the provisions that prohibit certain activities of the Government in the electoral process, which were necessary in the state of emergency (for example non-planned public procurement of respirators and other medical equipment, as well as adoption of measures for overcoming economic consequences of the pandemic etc.).

The state of an emergency was declared five times in 2020 in North Macedonia and lasted from March 18 till June 22, 2020.

According to the timetable of the State Electoral Commission, only 22 days were left till the Election Day, after the termination of the state of emergency. On June 22, the state of emergency expired, and the elections were supposed to be held after 22 days – on July 15.

The last day of state of emergency, the Government adopted a Decree with force of law regulating several different rules outside of those regulated in the Electoral Code, such as: there would be a special day determined for vote at home for persons isolated because of COVID-19, which would be two days before the day of elections; three members of the electoral board, who belong to the public administration, would be selected among health workers (other two were appointed by political parties); the Electoral Day would last until 21:00 instead of 19:00, which gave more time for voting; there would be two days of electoral silence; the additional time for paid media campaigning was allowed because the Coronavirus could influence the direct physical access to the voters and the ability to perform door-to-door campaigning.

The Constitutional Court decided on the constitutionality of the Decree with the force of law on election matter and found it constitutional. The Constitutional Court in its Resolution stated that “the Government, led by its constitutional competences, in the situation of state of emergency...reasonably assessed that the previously called parliamentary elections for April 12, 2020, cannot be held in during the state of emergency...and because of that the electoral activities carrying the elections must be interrupted for the period of state of emergency and to continue after it finishes, in legally determined terms, when the conditions for their holding will be created” (Constitutional Court 2020).

CHALLENGES DURING THE EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON JULY 15, 2020

The challenges of holding parliamentary elections in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic were mainly connected with introducing electoral procedures that would make voting safer without compromising the regularity of the electoral process, to enable presentation of candidates and pre-electoral campaigning without violating safety measures, efficiently to manage the electoral process in such circumstances, to secure that all voters no matter of their health conditions be able to vote etc. North Macedonia was also facing additional challenge – to motivate the voters in such circumstances to vote. These elections were first parliamentary elections after change of the name of the country, which did not lead toward opening negotiations for EU accession. The

decision to change of the name from the Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia was justified with the importance of opening negotiations for EU accession for the future of the country. Unfortunately, such decision was not adopted. Postponing the decision on commencement of talks led toward disappointment of the citizens and questioning whether it was worth it to change the name of the country only for the membership in NATO, which was obtained on March 27, 2020. So, the health crisis combined with the citizens' disappointment posed an additional challenge to motivate voters to vote.

What was already written by Antonio Spinelly: “the rapid adaptation of the management of elections to the Covid-19 crisis, exposed fault lines of the established electoral policies and practices which, developed and refined over decades of democratic evolution, had been designed and adopted to preserve election integrity in a different world order” (Spinelly 2021), was also valid in the case of North Macedonia.

Electoral campaigning during the early parliamentary elections on July 15, 2020

Fair rules, which allow presentation of all candidates and lists of the voters and a public debate about the issues that are of interest of the voters and candidates, are one of the key preconditions for free and fair elections. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected electoral campaign, because of the “risk of campaigns being unable to involve just the spreading of ideas—but also of the COVID-19 virus.” (Asplund *et al.* 2021).

New rules for social distancing, specific rules for public gatherings, health concerns of the voters during the meetings with such as with candidates, posed a special challenge how to reach each voter without endangering his/her health. In the tradition of North Macedonia's elections is door-to-door campaigning and organization of massive public gatherings. The electoral campaign, according to the Electoral code lasts 20 days and the biggest political parties traditionally organize two central public gatherings, on the first and on the last day of the electoral campaign on which they, bring their party members from across the country with buses to these central public gatherings. The aim of these two central public gatherings is to show the voters their “strength”, their “massive support” and the videos and photos from these events are used for paid advertisements. Between these two central public gatherings, electoral “caravan” visits each biggest town in which in the evening, the public gathering is also organized.

This kind of campaigning was impossible under COVID-19 circumstances. There were special rules for organizing public transport, that demanded the number of the passengers in the buses to be half of the number of the existing seats, so bringing party members from all over the country in one bigger city was too costly, but also risky for the health of the people in the buses. Even in such circumstances, the gatherings were not abounded by the political parties, and they were mainly organized with limited number of people. Some of the public gatherings looked as debates in which the party members were sitting on designated seats, while the candidates were standing or sitting in front of them, presenting the electoral program.

Other traditional way of electoral campaigning in North Macedonia is door-to-door campaign during which the candidates visit homes of the voters delivering them campaign materials. This campaigning was also limited, because of the need to avoid human contacts.

“The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered the style of campaign as parties adopted additional measures, for the most part eschewing traditional rallies in favour of small-scale meetings as well as limited door-to-door canvassing and other activities to meet with voters. Despite the circumstances, parties campaigned actively and were able to deliver their messages” (ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission 2020, 14).

The pandemic conditions for a campaign also had an impact on campaign financing. Refraining from large-scale pre-election rallies brought a considerable saving, especially as it eliminated the need to transport thousands of supporters to rally locations. Nevertheless, the production costs of media advertisements and the heavy use of billboard posters represented a significant expenditure (ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission 2020, 16).

The adopted Decree with force of law on electoral matters introduced changes in the rules for allocation and distribution of funds and time limits for paid political advertising. According to the rules, the money for media campaigning in amount of 2 EUR per registered voter was allocated by the state Budget. This amount was distributed in the following proportions: up to 45% and up to four minutes per hour of broadcast was to be allotted to two largest ruling political parties, and up to 45% and up to four minutes per hour of broadcast to the two largest parliamentary opposition parties. Other parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties and independent candidates were not to receive more than a combined total of 10 per cent of the funds and up to one minute per hour of broadcast.

The adopted Decree with force of law increased the allowed amount of paid political advertisements per real hour. This was justified with the need to increase the media campaign instead public gatherings and door to door campaign due to the pandemics. During an election campaign, both in the first and second round of voting, broadcasters could air a total of 15 hours per day of paid political advertising, and none of the political parties could use more than three minutes for advertising per hour. The two biggest ruling political parties might use a total of six minutes, with three minutes for each political party/coalition that had submitted a candidate list. The parties might use more than three minutes of advertising time per hour of paid political advertising if the other political party agreed and ceded part of its allotted time. The same rule also applied for two biggest opposition political parties. If one of the biggest ruling or opposition political parties did not submit a list, the biggest ruling and/or opposition political party that did submit a list might not use more than three minutes for advertising per hour.

As, ODIHR notes: “Three contestants, the coalitions led by SDSM-BESA and the VMRO-DPMNE as well as the DUI, were at significant advantage, by being entitled to spend EUR 800,000 each solely for the purposes of paid political advertisements, while the other twelve contestants were entitled to only EUR 30,000 each. The existing overregulation together with the repeated changes of the legal framework created legal uncertainty, while a disproportionate allocation of time and funds significantly limited the direct campaigning opportunities of twelve contestants, as they could not use any other funds to purchase paid political advertisements except those provided by the state” (ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission 2020, 21).

To qualify for the broadcasting and publication of paid political advertising, broadcasters and all print and online media must register with the State Election Commission. For the parliamentary elections in 2020, the registry consisted of 345 media outlets: 45 television stations, 53 radio broadcasters, 12 print outlets and 235 online outlets.

On the other side, the paid campaign in social media and online advertisement platforms were not specifically regulated in the Electoral Code and were used by the candidates without any control of expenditures.

In general, the electoral campaign during the pre-term parliamentary elections in 2020 in North Macedonia was restricted more by the fear of COVID-19, than by legal rules i.e., political parties refrained voluntarily from certain types of campaigning, which were not legally forbidden. Beside the need for adaptation of electoral process due to the pandemics, the legal rules and health protocols for the electoral campaign in North

Macedonia in 2020 were drafted in the spirit that ability to campaign should be restricted as minimally as possible.

Rules for voting during the early parliamentary elections on July 15, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the procedure for voting. There was a need to ensure the voters that safety in polling stations was preserved, as well as to allow all voters that were in quarantine because of the virus to cast their vote. The Electoral Code guarantees the possibility to vote early from their homes to ill voters. But, for those who were ill with COVID-19 or were in quarantine because of contacts with someone positive to COVID-19, the special procedure and day for early voting was established with the adopted Decree with force of law on electoral matters. Those voters had a possibility to vote two days before the day of elections. Applications for home voting was made through an authorized representative in person or electronically, via email, or through an online application. Special electoral boards were established for taking the votes of COVID-19 positive voters and those who were in self-isolation. These electoral boards were comprised by three healthcare workers and two representatives of the political parties. The members of these electoral boards were equipped with personal protective equipment and followed the procedure for social distancing and disinfection.

So, on July 13, 2020, 67 special electoral boards conducted voting in 57 municipalities in which 759 voters, who were COVID-19 positive or in self-isolation, registered for vote. From them 723 voted on this early voting.

Another measure that was introduced for the safety of the polling stations was an extension of pooling hours. Instead of till 19:00, the voters were able to vote till 21:00. State Electoral Commission, together with the Health Commission implemented COVID-safe protocol for all polling places, ensuring that voting is safe for voters and election staff. There were rules for limited number of persons in the polling stations, cleaning and hand sanitation procedures, ventilation of the polling station, the cleaning of voting materials, and personal protective equipment for polling officials etc.

These health protocols were largely respected by voters and members of the electoral boards, but some of the polling stations were not sufficiently spacious to allow for the recommended distance between persons. "As the number of voters allowed into a polling station equaled the number of booths, the queues that ensued resulted in crowds in

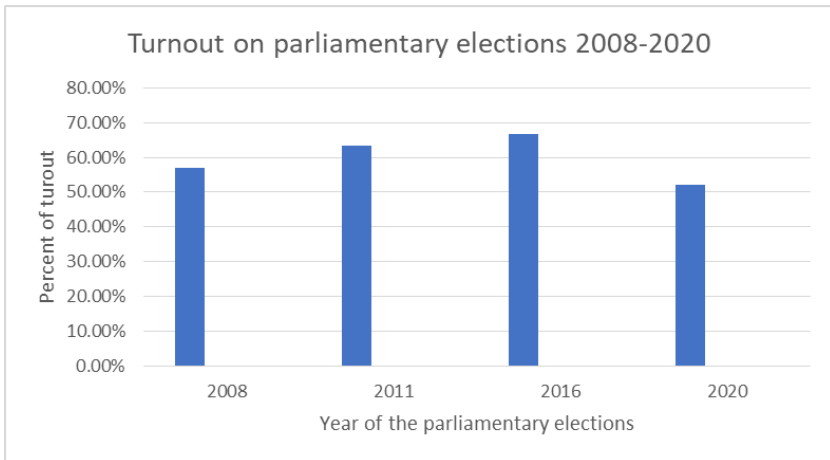
common spaces, particularly where several polling stations were located in the same premises” (ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission 2020, 27).

It is worth mentioning that the country borders were opened without any obligatory quarantining of entrants into the country in order not to prevent the diaspora from coming home for summer holidays to use their right to vote.

The number of registered voters was 1.814.263 from which 943.750 or 52% voted. Some of the analysts point that these elections were characterized with the lowest turnout of the voters due to the fear from pandemic of COVID-19, as well as because of general disappointment of the citizens from political parties, because of their lack of capacities to focus on offering real policies for the problems of the citizens (Бекман-Диркес и др. 2020).

If we compare the turnout of the voters in 2020 parliamentary elections in North Macedonia with the turnout in previous parliamentary elections, we can see that in 2008 - 57,06% of the voters voted, in 2011 – 63,5%, in 2014 – 62,96% and in 2016 - 66,79%. The real question is whether this decline of the turnout in 2020 is mainly because of the pandemic. The highest turnout in 2016 was due to the need for change of the government that was felt by the majority of the citizens. So, motivation and mobilization on these elections were very high which resulted in high turnout of 66,79%.

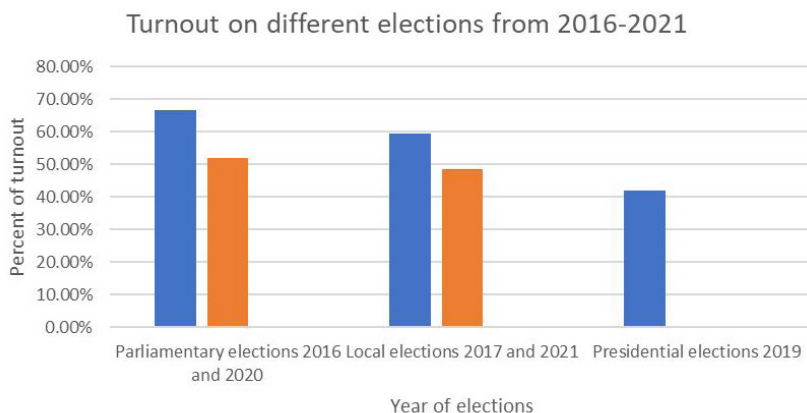
Graph 1. Turnout on parliamentary elections 2008-2020.



Source: the author’s analysis

If we compare the turnout on the 2020 parliamentary elections with the turnout on the different elections from 2017 till now, we can see that the turnout in the first round on the presidential elections in 2019 was 41,82% and 41,67% in the second round. On the first round on the local elections in 2017 the turnout was 59,51%, while in 2021 it was 48,6%.

Graph 2. Turnout on elections 2016-2021.



Source: the author's analysis

So, the pandemic had its influence on the turnout of the voters, but the disappointment of the voters by political parties, unsuccessful realization of the campaign promises from 2016 and deadlock in the EU accession process, significantly lowered the turnout to elections in 2020 and 2021, which were held during health crisis, but also in 2019, before COVID-19 pandemic.

Other COVID-19 aspects of parliamentary elections in 2020

The Electoral code in the Republic of North Macedonia contains provisions that prohibit electoral corruption and misuse of the state resources in electoral campaigning. Such provisions prohibit from the day of the adoption of the decision for the announcement of the elections until the completion of the election:

- use of Budget funds or public funds or funds of public enterprises or other legal entities that have state capital at their disposal for the commencement of construction of new infrastructural facilities,

such as roads, waterworks, transmission lines, sewage, sports fields and other facilities, or social activities' facilities – schools, kindergartens and other buildings, unless Budget funds have previously been allocated for that purpose, i.e. unless it is part of the implementation of the program adopted based on a law in the current year; and

– payment of salaries, pensions, social welfare or other payments and financial compensations from budget funds or public funds that are not regular monthly payments, or all annual transfers and payments or single transfers from budget funds or public funds, as well as selling of public capital or signing collective agreements, and

– initiating a procedure for employment of new persons or a procedure for termination of employment with state and public institutions, whereas the already initiated procedures shall be suspended, except in cases of urgent and immediate matters.

Also, within a period of 20 days prior to the commencement of the election campaign until the completion of the elections the following is forbidden to hold public events on the occasion of the commencement of construction or use of facilities with resources from the Budget or from public funds, or with resources from public enterprises or other legal entities that have state capital at their disposal that are infrastructural facilities, such as roads, waterworks, transmission lines, sewage, sports fields and other facilities, or social activities' facilities - schools, kindergartens and other buildings.

Because the electoral process was interrupted with the declaration of the state of emergency, these provisions of the Electoral Code were not in force during the state of emergency. That was regulated with the adopted Decree with force of law on electoral matters. Suspension of these limitations was necessary because the COVID-19 pandemic brought not only a health crisis, but also an economic crisis and a social crisis, or as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated it: “The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency — but it is far more. It is an economic crisis. A social crisis. And a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis” (Guterres 2020). Because many of the economic and social right of the citizens were affected, among which the right to employment and right to a salary, the Government of North Macedonia adopted several decrees with force of law containing economic and social measures, which in normal times are forbidden in the period from calling the elections. These measures aimed social transfers to workers who lost their jobs, as well as social transfers for salaries to the enterprises which

were affected by the COVID-19 pandemics with an obligation to keep the workers at least certain time after the transfer. So, in normal times, such measures would have been considered as electoral corruption, because of what are forbidden with the Electoral Code and some even with the Criminal Code.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes in everyday life, but also to the electoral process. Some adaptations of the electoral process were clearly needed in order to preserve public health from the virus.

The contemporary political and legal science reached a consensus on the significance of elections and electoral systems for the development of the political system, consolidation of democracy and the establishment and maintenance of democratic stability. Holding free and fair elections is an important challenge for every country for maintaining democratic stability and rule. But, holding free and fair elections during COVID-19 pandemic poses a special challenge because of the need to protect the health of the citizens without limiting rights that are an important part of democratic electoral process. Even in pandemic, the electoral process must be voter-friendly, accessible, and inclusive. Even in such circumstances, the voters must not be discouraged from voting because they see the vote as unnecessary risk. Because of that, additional efforts are necessary to make elections in pandemic an inclusive, participatory, and trusted process.

While many countries are thinking not about the “bringing voters to the ballot box”, but about strategies that will “bring the ballot box to the voters”, in North Macedonia such strategies are not into consideration because of many electoral irregularities that were noted during the electoral processes in the past, as were family and proxy voting. Distrust among political parties during the electoral processes, take out of the consideration postal or electronic voting. Even more, for 2021 local elections, fingerprint identification of the voters on polling stations was introduced. So, when the traditional voting in polling stations is the only possible alternative, the task of electoral administration was to make these polling stations safe for the voters on elections during COVID-19 pandemic. Health protocols that were implemented functioned well in most of the polling stations in 2020 parliamentary and 2021 local elections in North Macedonia.

But balancing between health protection and democratic elections also posed a challenge to the electoral campaign. Democratic discussion

and contestation are important aspects of the free and fair elections. Freedom of expression and right of candidates to reach the voters must not be restricted even in the pandemic. The political parties in North Macedonia during 2020 elections turned toward new ways of electoral campaigning and left some of the traditional campaigning. Media campaigning and campaigning on social networks were dominant methods of electoral campaign.

The turnout of voters in 2020 elections in North Macedonia was the lowest compared to other parliamentary elections. COVID-19 influenced the turnout, but disappointment of the citizens from political parties was also important factor for such turnout.

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CIRCUMSTANCES THROUGH POLITICAL AND LEGAL LENSES

Abstract

As one of the Balkan post-communist countries, Albania faces different hindering factors in the process of constituting election's democracy. In the parliamentary election of April 2021, Albania was challenged by an additional extraordinary obstacle, of holding parliamentary election during the Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions imposed new realities to the electoral process, specifically in: development of electoral campaign, voting process, diaspora voting, voters with Covid-19, voting process in the penitentiary system and the new electoral reform placed in 2020. Therefore, through a mixed political and legal detailed analyses method of the above-mentioned factors, this paper's aim is to respond to the research question of what the impact of Covid-19 restrictions in Albanian Parliamentary election of April 2021 is. Research data are mostly based on primary data, such as the political agreement, the legal acts of State Commissioner, Regulatory Commission, sanctions and appeals decisions and other related documents. We strongly stand that the new reality must

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not break in the fundamental principles of electoral process and related political actors' rights.

Keywords: Covid-19, parliamentary election, election restrictions, election standards, Albania

INTRODUCTION

In order to have free and fair elections, an election system that includes the election administration, aims to create the appropriate environment for voters to exercise their right to vote with no limitations. The most fundamental principle defining credible elections is that they must reflect the free expression of the will of the people and in order to achieve this, elections should be transparent, inclusive, and accountable, and there must be equitable opportunities to compete in the elections (USAID 2021). Election administration and electoral management are crucial factors in the outcome of the electoral process. It should be evident by now that there is no unique way to conduct free and fair elections and democracies have developed substantially different rules for the electoral game. One might have thought issues pertaining to the administration of elections to be sorted out, yet most of them are anything but resolved (Massicotte et al. 2004, 158-162).

Holding an election in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is an exceptionally difficult task (Pyrzyńska & Skoczylas 2020, 240) and studies show that late legislation changes of electoral process in adapting to the pandemic situation would undermine the administrative capacity of electoral officials to deliver the election while taking the risk to experiment in the middle of a perfect storm (James 2021, 67). COVID-outbreak affected mostly all areas of public and private life all over the world and it has had a significant impact on our democracies including elections (CoE 2022). The current COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an unpredictable external shock with consequences for the development of democracy, and particularly electoral politics, in the world (Santana *et al.* 2020, 2). The literature of electoral effects studies for countries which held election during the Covid-19 pandemic is still at its first steps. Hence the author's effort to base the analyses mainly on the primary data of election management and process.

Elections are one of the main indicators in mapping the political regime of a country. Although Albania has a record of competitive elections, the political regime in Albania is still identified as a hybrid

regime with highly polarized parties often organized around leading personalities (Freedom House 2022). General elections were held on April 25, 2021, following the cross-party agreement of June 5, 2020, that led to a wide-ranging electoral reform that took place in ‘specific’ circumstances during Covid-19 pandemics and the very delicate electoral processes were tackled from different Covid-19 restrictions. In normal elections, countries like Albania do have some instances of questionable levels in implementation of a fully democratic electoral process (OSCE 2017, 2013) and this task became more challenging in a pandemic situation where it was difficult to fully adhere to the highest law framework concerning the safety standards for voters and people involved in a free and fair election process. During the COVID-19 situation the administration had to enforce election procedures and protocols that can have an effect on the voters’ behavior and on the macro level to the democratic institutions per se. Similarly to other countries that held election during the pandemic period, the new settings brought difficulties in the preservation of democratic election spirit and principle. Each of the segments of these parliamentary elections were re-dimensioned, re-modelled and sometimes missed out or substituted due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The OSCE/ODIHR final assessment highlighted many concerns, but stated that elections were generally well organized, and that the new electoral administration gained the trust of most stakeholders.

Apart from the hybrid regime issues, the electoral bodies of Albania weren’t prepared for the situation of dealing with this extreme attack and pandemic virus. More specifically this paper is focused on exploring and analyzing three main points of parliamentary election regarding the CEC decision making, what occurred during elections day and also the results of the process. From the perspective of the researchers, this new and real situation needs a special attention of being treated in the field of research in order to identify the problems and offering at the same time the prompt solutions in this regard. The basic aim must always stand for saving the core of democratic principles even in different conditions that tackle voting processes or other related dimensions.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The authors focus on the independent variable of the Covid-19 pandemic as a cause of changing the election organization process in Albania. The methodology is organized in order to reach out the following objectives: exploration and narrative analysis. This in specific stands for monitoring the activity of CEC (Central Election Commission) and other

related bodies in Albania during parliamentary elections and narrative interpretations through statistical information got during parliamentary elections. Therefore, through a mixed political and legal detailed analyses method of the above-mentioned factors, this paper aim is to respond the research question of what the impact of Covid-19 restrictions in Albanian Parliamentary organization election of April 2021 is, as well as formal conditions for free and fair elections. Research data are mostly based on primary data, such as the political agreement, the legal acts of State Commissioner, Regulatory Commission, sanctions and appeals decisions and other related documents.

THE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IN ALBANIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS THROUGH CEC DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Albanian Parliamentary Elections were held immediately after the electoral reform was finalized into legal and political coordinates. The Electoral Code changed and was amended in most of its parts (Electoral Code of Republic of Albania 2021). The Electoral Code still charged CEC to decide on further legal acts for the detailed regulations according to the elections in our country. What is somehow interesting is the fact that the Electoral Code did not provide specific regulations under different circumstances or emergency situations like Covid (IFES 2021, 5; Komisioni Qëndror i Zgjedhjeve/Central Electoral Commission [KQZ] 2022). The provision of some specific regulations for specific situations in the Electoral Code would have probably ‘saved’ the principles of electoral rights under the circumstance of emergency situations and would have been helpful for conducting elections in Albania. We also evaluate and bring into attention that this phenomenon is not experienced only by Albanian election, but it impacted also to other countries that held elections in the Covid-19 pandemics framework (Czech Republic, Romania, France etc.). The reality of the elections held in 2020 and beyond clearly demonstrated that the legal and policy framework was not ready showing institutional framework unprepared and disorientated on managing and properly dealing with Covid-19 pandemics restrictions and guaranteeing electoral rights into the main principles and content.

Due to the changes of the electoral reform, the elections were organized in a decentralized dimension: Commissioner, Regulatory Commission, Appealing and Sanctions Commission (KAS) and Electoral College (an ad hoc court responsible only for election complaints in the judicial context). Analysing the decision-making of all these election

bodies, none of them had treated or paid a special focus and attention of proper management of electoral process in the framework of Covid-19 pandemics restrictions. Going through this decision making, there are reflected only 'shadows' provisions in this regard as following:

1. *Commissioner*: Up to the end of the electoral process, the Commissioner took 479 decisions, 232 orders and 15 instructions. (KQZ 2022). Among all this large number of decisions, there is only one instruction of the Commissioner that speaks in a vague and general perspective for Covid-19 pandemics during electoral processes (State Election Commission, CEC, and Instruction No. 11. April 24, 2021 [KQZ 2022]): Reading out this provision, there is not any specific provision or regulation of persons hospitalized or isolated because of Covid-19. There are only general templates of declarations of voting centres members and writing again some general provisions presented from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania for Covid-19 measures. We consider that during this single instruction, the Commissioner had many opportunities to go from a general instruction to a very detailed one, including also the possibilities and procedures on how people isolated because of Covid-19 could vote.

2. *Regulatory Commission*: For 2021 elections, Regulatory Commission took 21 decisions (KQZ 2022). The role of the Regulatory Commission, in the frame of the electoral reform was to set up all the detailed issues in regard to the elections procedure till the beginning of the electoral campaign, election day and for the results. Analysing these decisions, no specific provision for the right of isolated people because of Covid-19 was provided. Even Regulatory Commission decision making was in the same line with the Commissioner, providing just general rules of keeping the distance, avoiding crowded spaces in polling stations, equipment of face masks etc. in order to fulfil the decisions framework set up from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania. We evaluate that the decision-making of the Regulatory Commission did not bring anything new on this regard, just repeating the conditions set up from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection does not accomplish its role in order on how to guarantee the right to vote for the people isolated because of Covid-19.

3. *KAS (Commission of Appeal and Sanctions)*: This structure, even being considered as an added value of the new electoral reform, in 120 decisions (KQZ 2022) taken, there is no case where Covid-19 treatment is appealed or treated. The nature of the cases treated

from this Commission concerns the legal identity of candidates, elections results etc. This does not mean that the Albanian reality has not faced problems related to electoral vote of people isolated or hospitalized because of Covid-19. One of the main issues that have addressed in no complaint to this structure is the absence of the provisions on the Electoral Code and secondary legislation.

4. *Electoral College*: no decision related to Covid-19 restrictions and measures. We bring into attention of this research the same argument as in KAS decision making and attitude in 2021 elections.

Among this general panorama, we have also identified some specific cases that need to be treated with a special analysis dimension. In this regard, one of the problems of election administration in terms of anti-Covid measures in the April 25 elections has been the failure to take appropriate measures in time from the legislative aspect (decisions, instructions, etc.) by the Election Regulatory Commission, as the competent body for organizing and administering election procedures. This commission one month before the general elections, in decision no. 11, dated 25.03.21 “On the manner of establishment, organization, functioning of the polling station commission and the conduct of elections in the polling station” (Komisioneri Shtetëror i Zgjedhjeve, Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve 2021), has not provided in any of the provisions of this decision the guaranteeing and respecting of the anti-Covid-19 measures. The guideline in this framework of the implementation of anti-covid measures was approved only one day before the general elections, on 24.04.2021 “On the implementation of anti-covid measures during the voting day for the elections for the Parliament” (KQZ 2022). This very tight deadline did not create a good and safe basis in the preparation and treatment of persons/election staff that stayed in the polling stations, related to the framework rules in taking and respecting the measures to limit the spread of Covid-19. The non-adoption of specific rules in the context of Covid-19, consequently led to frequent cases of ceding compliance with the general rules of Covid-19 approved by the Ministry of Health, and consequently created potential spaces for the spread of the virus in polling stations. Here we must take into consideration the large number of people standing in a polling station in the parliamentary elections in Albania: seven commissioners and observers from various actors such as international organizations, civil society, political parties, etc.) (KQZ 2022, 80).

In addition to the above, one aspect to be evaluated in the CEC as the main body of election administration, is the adaptation that this institution made to its functional infrastructure in terms of Covid-19

restrictions. The CEC organized its online meetings, activities which increased the level of transparency towards voters, the public, the media, other national and international institutions, as well as civil society. Open access to the decision-making process of the CEC is a positive factor in terms of increasing the credibility of the above-mentioned actors to the activity of the CEC.

COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IMPACT DURING ELECTION DAY

The elections held in specific settings such as Covid-19 pandemics need to be analysed even from the perspective of the right to vote of citizens under Covid circumstances. The category of the people which had an impact from Covid-19 (positive and in sometime a negative one) in the election results can be defined as following: people with Covid-19 hospitalized, people with Covid-19 isolated at home, people with Covid-19 in diaspora community.

Concerning the first group of the hospitalised ones, in the day of elections, according to the database of Ministry of Health 149 persons were hospitalized due to Covid-19 (ENEMO 2021). The decision making of CEC and other elected bodies did not determine any specific rules and procedures for the hospitalized people to vote. Due to the legislation in force people with Covid-19 were supposed to be isolated and avoid the contacts, so it means that there was not any possibility for them to vote. The manuals for voting centre produced by Regulatory Commission and the individual acts from Commissioner did not provide any specific regulation in this regard. Even though, this number cannot play a significant role on the elections results, it is moreover a matter of principles. It would be helpful that in the manuals of voting procedures the Regulatory Commission provided specific rules in order to facilitate the opportunities to these categories. It is the same logic with the possibilities that the manuals of voting procedures provide for other categories that cannot be present at the voting centre for valid reasons. The examples provided from Venice Commission and other countries do not validate the vote with the physical presence and polling station. The international standards aim to secure the whole process. According to the general standards and principles set up from Venice Commission, the electronic or mail vote could be an alternative solution that would be offered to these categories. Along to the above, the second group of home isolated citizens, according to Covid-19 mechanism, the average of the infection line was 1:5. Hence, more or less 149 people that were

hospitalized because of Covid could have infected 750 people (more or less), and consequently impeding this number of people to vote on April, 25. We assess that this category has not been carefully considered during different monitoring processes.

Furthermore, with respect to the third group of the diaspora voters, we stand by the viewpoint that also in this case the electoral bodies did not commit much regarding this. The diaspora does not have the right to vote from the countries where they live. Also, in the Covid-19 travel restrictions situation and also the state borders restrictions increased the probability of the Albanian people to travel and vote in Albania. The regulations did not provide any specific provisions for electronic vote, vote by mail or other alternatives respecting the scope of elections and right to vote.

We understand that this situation has produced a strange and somehow unexpected situation to be solved and managed properly, but on the other hand taking into consideration other countries that implemented Venice recommendations into the Covid-19 and elections environment, we think that the following alternatives could have been used to solve the problem:

1. Electronic vote as a possibility to address the will of these categories being accompanied with the valid reasons why this category cannot vote.
2. Sending vote by post with all the adequate alternatives to save the people's right and on the other side of the medal guaranteeing the main principles of the election process.
3. Creating 'movable polling stations' respecting all the Covid-19 restrictions and measures in order to make possible for the people with Covid or those in isolation to vote, express their will if they wanted to. This dimension could have been organized in collaboration terms between CEC structures and Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

ELECTION PROCESS RESULTS UNDER THE PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

“Electoral democracy depends on voter participation, but new or fragile democracies often suffer from low levels of formal political engagement” (De Kadt 2019, 2). The April 25 election, under conditions of the pandemic restrictions, conditioned an artificial abstention of a percentage of voters who otherwise could have voted. Given that according to the Albanian Electoral Code, the voter can only vote in

person at the polling station, the lack of other voting procedures such as “by mail or mobile ballot box was not provided” (IDEA 2022), limited persons who have been hospitalized, self-isolated (Bota Sot 2021) after having contracted Covid-19, Albanian citizens living abroad as well as prisoners who have contracted Covid-19. The lack of political will to include these groups in the voting process, in addition to the artificial reduction of the number of participants in the elections, from the point of view of political analysis doesn’t bring very positive general perception of democratic elections in Albania by political actors involved in the administration of elections, such as the CEC, the current government, political parties, etc.

The April parliamentary election campaign took place in extraordinary conditions compared to previous election campaigns, hampering the normal operation of a political party election campaign. In most cases, the political parties respected the restrictions of the anti-Covid measures of the decisions of the Technical Experts Committee¹ regarding the restriction of meetings of larger numbers of people than ten, physical distancing, wearing masks, etc. However there have been cases of non-compliance. These conditions also limit the visibility of the campaign of political parties and candidates to the electorate, thus affecting restrictions on the disclosure of the political platform of candidates and political parties to the electorate, and consequently creating a greater barrier for voters to be informed and therefore free right to choose under complete political information was reduced. On the other hand, it has often been observed that political parties and candidates were not prevented from respecting these restrictions by the relevant authorities, such as the state police and as a result the health of voters was endangered. In the context of participation in elections, this factor may also be an element which has indirectly reduced voter turnout on the election day, given the fact that in these large number of people gatherings there might have been outbreaks of the virus, consequently, persons affected by Covid during these meetings would not go to the polls on the election day.

Another factor of hindering the participation in election of the voters is the awareness campaign carried out by the CEC. Since Downs’ (1957) seminal work on why people vote, electoral participation is linked with different factors such as psychological, economical, personal, etc. along with the list of factors in the pandemic period another crucial factor could be brought into attention of the voter in order to influence in its decision to vote or abstain. This campaign did not guarantee the non-

1 This Commission is formed to take measures and follow the dynamics of the situation in the world and to take measures and how to intervene in Albania (Gegvataj 2020).

dissemination of the virus, especially in the polling stations, influencing the voters not to trust that the restrictive measures against the spread of Covid-19 would be respected in the polling stations. “Only a brief and hardly accessible video was prepared for voters and published on the CEC website a few days before the Election Day. In the video, it was claimed that the measures would be respected in all voting centres, the premises would be disinfected and equipped with a disinfectant. Voters were asked to keep their distance and wear protective masks” (ENEMO 2021, 19). In addition, the rules of anti-Covid-19 measures were often not observed in the polling stations, which was noticed in a large number of voters waiting in line to vote, non-observance of social distance between them, high number of persons inside the centre of voting, etc., are factors that have in some way violated the integrity of elections in Albania. As Santana, Rama and Bértoa (Santana *et al.* 2020, 20) state in their research “when faced with the choice of exercising their civic (democratic) duty and avoiding a personal (health) risk, voters will tend to opt for the latter”. Consequently, the CEC truncated legal measures, decisions or instructions and not guaranteeing the voters for their health and safety against not getting the virus in the polling station on election day, as well as during the election campaign, could be a factor which has led to a decrease in the number of voters in the elections of April 25, 2021, in Albania.

The elections held in the above-mentioned situation reflected a relatively low turnout where the country voter election participation was lower than half of the actual registered number of voters in Albania, 46.33%. The highest level of participation happened in the capital city of Tirana 53.24% (which constitutes also the main electoral division comparing to the 12 electoral regions). And the lowest level of election participation was in the Vlora region 33.56%, which is the fifth largest region, inferring thus the low level of citizens’ participation in the core base engagement of democracy.

Unlike previous parliamentary election campaigns, the content of the electoral platform of the running political parties had in its content the new element of the pandemic management. The discourse, especially of the ruling party, the Socialist Party, stressed in its content platform the success in the Covid-19 vaccination program against Covid, the good administration of the pandemic by the government and health institutions in the country, the reconstruction process after the 2019 earthquake and other development aspects such as economic, employment, juridical reform, etc. The Democratic Party and the Socialist Movement for Integration, on the other hand, in their public discourse emphasize their

criticism of the government pandemic management, the authoritarian management of the country and politics of the prime minister, by centralizing the power in his hands and leading therefore to the abuse of public resource. Moreover, in the pandemic situation the campaign of the political parties had a considerable shift towards the online campaign (IDEA 2022), compared to previous elections. However, as Kume states in DW “this campaign has innovations its form, but not its content”, concerning “the behaviour of political entities in election in relation to the voter.” “The campaign is characterized by a lack of ideas, objectives for good governance and an excess of statements” (DW 2021). Social media platforms became a good ground of influencing the electorate, especially the young age group of voters who mostly use the social media. The main political parties raised their visibility through the online campaign, and on the other hand this platform, granted them the ground to campaign even if they did not offer a concrete political platform in the 2021 parliamentary election.

The low turnout and the adaptation of the election campaign to the pandemic restrictions favoured the Socialist Party, which won a third term in office for the first time in the history of pluralism in Albania. According to the Central Election Commission the 2021 election results are: Social democratic Party (PSD) 2.25%, three parliament seats, Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) 6.81%, 4 parliament seats, Democratic Party “Alliance for Change” (PD-AN) 39.43%, 59 parliament seats and Socialist Party of Albania (PS) 48.67%, 74 parliament seats. (KQZ 2022).

CONCLUSION

The parliamentary election of April 2021 in Albania apart from the democratic developing concerns challenged an additional obstacle of being held during Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. In these circumstances several parts of the parliamentary elections were re-dimensioned, re-modelled and sometimes missed out or substituted due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The article deals with the impact on the organization of elections in Albania, as well as formal conditions for free and fair elections. The analyses identified several problematics of election organization and implementation in the Covid-19 pandemic conditions. In terms of the Covid-19 legislative measures such as decision, instructions, etc., there were fallacies from the Election Regulatory Commission management body. Although, on the other hand CEC did manage to make some adaptation to its functional infrastructure such as online meetings.

Considering the decision making of CEC and other elected bodies they did not determine any specific rules and procedures for groups of voters such as the hospitalized people to vote, the isolated at home from the virus and the diaspora community. Furthermore, the April parliamentary election campaign took place in extraordinary conditions compared to previous election campaigns, hampering the normal operation of a political party election campaign, condition that per se limited the campaign visibility, and a somehow disenchantment of the candidates from the voters. Therefore, considering the circumstances of the live contact margins, the political parties and candidates shifted a considerable part of their campaign towards the online social media.

In conclusion, based on the research and monitoring analyses of 2021 Albanian Parliamentary elections, the authors believe that the election process could have been better managed in order to provide and guarantee properly the citizens' rights for elections. First, the Electoral Code could have provided some basic principles and details in regard of Covid-19 pandemics restrictions during electoral process. This was an alternative to be implemented, because the new electoral reform came into force during 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was present and faced a real obstacle and issue to be dealt with in the frame of elections. Second, CEC decision making could have been more detailed and open minded for providing details of people hospitalized or isolated because of having covid. Movable polling stations could have been an alternative and on the other side electronic or vote by post could have been also a choice.

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PANDEMIC SIDE-EFFECTS OR SAME OLD ELECTORAL APATHY? THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON THE 2020 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA

Abstract

The year 2020 was an electoral year in Romania, with local and parliamentary elections being held in September and December. In the midst of the pandemic crisis, with new rules to be followed, both during the electoral campaign and at the polls, none of the two electoral moments seemed to be visibly influenced by the sudden changes of the social context. Neither the turnout, nor the main electoral themes saw much change compared to previous elections. This paper seeks to analyze the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the 2020 parliamentary elections in Romania, with an emphasis on the electoral turnout and the legislative changes that the pandemic has provoked and that contributed to maintaining parliamentary instability and fragmentation. Yet rather than being Covid-related complications, the fragmentation of the political right, the inability of the political left to form a majority despite winning the elections, the flaws of the electoral law, the apathy of the voters were all a by-product of the same old dysfunctions that haunt the Romanian political system. In this sense, we can argue that the pandemic continued to enable them further.

Keywords: Romania, parliamentary elections, turnout, electoral legislation, fragmentation, Covid-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning, the coronavirus pandemic changed the way people live their lives, the way they carry out their daily activities, but also the way they make political decisions, at local, national, and international level. This health crisis has affected not only the national health systems, but also politics in general, with governments being forced to make quick, often unpopular decisions in certain areas. Thus, in most countries, the COVID-19 pandemic forced governments to institute various legal and constitutional measures in their attempt to control the crisis. One of the areas where governments were forced to come up with solutions has been the electoral process (both local and national), which proved to be quite challenging, given that elections represent one of the core tenets of any democratic political system.

In 2020, Romania organized both parliamentary and local elections (the latter had been postponed as a direct consequence of the pandemic). In both cases, turnout was lower than in the previous elections, in 2016. The main working hypothesis of this paper is that this decline in turnout was not mainly due to the sanitary crisis, but rather part of a persistent trend that has been going on in Romania for the last two decades. Using the data on electoral turnout and the election results, we argue that electoral absenteeism is a phenomenon rooted in the Romanian society rather than one generated by the pandemic context. This is more noticeable in the case of the parliamentary elections, where turnout fell to just under 40% in three of the last four elections (2008, 2016, 2020) and only slightly exceeded this level in 2012.

Indeed, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only aggravated some of the dysfunctions that the Romanian political system was facing anyway, but it was not the main reason for the collapse of voters' interest in the electoral process. On the contrary, on the day of the parliamentary elections, the authorities decided to temporarily relax some of the measures which had been implemented at that time, in order to facilitate and encourage electoral participation. Paradoxically enough, the effects of relaxation were practically non-existent. In this paper, we analyze the changes to the electoral legislation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and, by looking at official data on turnout and electoral results and comparing them to previous electoral moments, we argue that the effects of the sanitary crisis on the electoral turnout have been overshadowed by the same old electoral apathy that characterizes the electoral landscape in Romania in recent years.

ELECTIONS ACROSS EUROPE IN 2020 AND 2021. HOW DID DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS RESPOND TO THE PANDEMIC?

Perhaps there is nothing that better defines democracy than the fact that it is a regime in which free and fair elections are held regularly. Robert Dahl (1971), Giovanni Sartori (1987), Joseph Schumpeter (1947), Arendt Lijphart (2012), Larry Diamond (1999) or Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1991), to name just a few, have analyzed the concept of democracy from multiple theoretical perspectives and, no matter how different their views and approaches were, they all acknowledged the essential role that elections and political participation play in the proper functioning of any democracy. However, as has been the case in many states, the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic called into question the very process on which the electoral systems are based.

From February 2020 until the end of 2021, according to a continuously updated report of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), at least 80 countries and territories around the globe had decided to postpone certain national or local / regional elections, as well as special elections like referendums (IDEA 2022a). In Europe alone, at least 27 local, parliamentary, and even presidential elections were postponed. As it can be seen from Table 1, most of these elections were originally scheduled to take place in the first part of 2020, that is in the first months of the pandemic, when most European states had instituted a state of emergency or other extremely strict measures to manage the pandemic. We have chosen to present only the information about parliamentary, presidential, or local elections and nationwide referendums, excluding the results from by-elections or local referendums.

Table 1. Local, general, and presidential elections and national referendums postponed in Europe in 2020 and 2021.

Country	Election type	Originally scheduled	Postponed to
Armenia	Referendum on changes to the Constitutional Court	5 April 2020	Summer 2021
BiH	Local elections	4 October 2020	15 November 2020
Finland	Municipal elections	18 April 2021	13 June 2021
France	Second round of local elections	22 March 2020	28 June 2020
France	Regional and departmental elections	March 2021	20 June 2021
Italy	National referendum	29 March 2020	20/21 September 2020
N. Macedonia	Parliamentary elections	12 April 2020	15 July 2020
Poland	Presidential elections	10 May 2020	28 June and 12 July 2020
Romania	Local elections	May-June 2020	27 September 2020
Russia	Nation-wide Constitutional referendum	22 April 2020	1 July 2020
Serbia	General elections	26 April 2020	21 June 2020
Switzerland	Federal vote	17 May 2020	27 September 2020

Source: the author's analysis

On the other hand, in many cases, the elections took place according to the initial calendar. It should be noted, however, that these electoral processes fell in two categories: either scheduled to take place during February or in the first part of March 2020, when the pandemic had not yet been officially declared and Europe was not facing a large number of cases, or were elections scheduled after the first two waves, when the level of infections was plummeting (IDEA 2022a). IDEA kept track of all those cases on a specific section of their website, dedicated to the pandemic impact on elections worldwide. Nevertheless, between April and May 2020, no European state respected their pre-pandemic electoral schedule and only from the second half of June, the electoral processes resumed in several states. The decision to postpone the elections came,

therefore, as an absolute necessity, especially in the first part of the health crisis, when governments around the world lacked information about COVID-19 and feared that by moving forwards and holding the elections, the population would be subjected to additional risks. As such, they preferred to reschedule them at a later time, once the situation began to improve. But had the health crisis affected the electoral process? Did the pandemic have any other effects on the election, beyond those concerning the additional safety measures that had been put in place? Did it cause a drop in electoral turnout? Did the political parties change their discourse and approach during the election campaigns?

The novel socio-political and sanitary situation had a major impact on the electoral processes, forcing governments, political parties, and candidates not only to change their approaches to election campaigns, but also the very way in which elections were going to be organized. Aside from this, however, the influence of the pandemic must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, at national or local levels and compared to previous recorded trends of those countries' electoral processes.

An analysis from IDEA indicated that in most states where elections were held between February and August 2020, there was a noticeable drop in turnout, which raised many questions about the legitimacy of those elections. However, in some cases (including Poland, Slovakia, Montenegro, etc.), turnout increased compared to previous elections (2008-2019), which means that other factors influencing turnout also need to be considered. Among them, we can identify such aspects as: the adoption of complementary measures on electronic or postal voting; the political context; or the perceived high stakes of elections considered crucial for the population (especially where the differences between candidates were very small as was the case in Poland or Montenegro) (IDEA 2022b).

THE ROMANIAN CASE. PANDEMIC-RELATED CHANGES IN THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

In 1990, immediately after the fall of the communist regime, Romania adopted an electoral system of proportional representation (PR) for the election of members of Parliament. Initially, there was no electoral threshold, later (in 1992) a threshold of 3% was set and only after 2000, the threshold of 5% was established. PR has been used in Romania from 1990 until the 2004 elections and after several electoral cycles, was once more reinstated in 2016. For the 2008 and 2012 parliamentary elections,

Romania used a “particular” type of mixed system, which was supposed to be a “uninominal” voting system (similar with the first-past-the post voting) (Law no. 35/2008). Why do we consider it to be a “particular” type of mixed system? Because even though the electoral process involved the election of individual candidates in uninominal constituencies, the system included two different stages of vote redistribution, at county (representing the constituency) and national level, using proportional procedures. These redistributions were in place because a candidate could only directly obtain the deputy or senator mandate if they managed to win at least 50% + 1 of the valid votes cast in the electoral college in which they were running. In all other colleges where no candidate was able to obtain at least 50% + 1 of the votes, the mandates would be redistributed. Because the effects of this electoral system proved to be more negative than positive, it was abolished and from the 2016 parliamentary elections, the country returned to the PR system (for more details see: Ivănescu 2015a, 111-117; Ivănescu 2015b, 151-158; Ivănescu 2014, 180-189; Ivănescu 2013, 159-173).

Currently, the parliamentary elections in Romania are held in accordance with Law no. 208/2015 and are still based in a PR system, covering 43 electoral constituencies (41 counties, the Municipality of Bucharest and one constituency for the Romanian citizens residing abroad). The representation rate is one deputy to 73.000 inhabitants and one senator to 168.000 inhabitants (Law no. 208/2015, art. 5) and the electoral threshold is 5% of the total number of valid votes cast at national level or 20% of the total number of valid votes cast in at least four electoral constituencies for the political parties, and between 8% and 10% for alliances, based on the number of members (Law no. 208/2015, art. 94).

In order to hold the parliamentary elections in December 2020, the Parliament had adopted earlier, in September, Law no. 202/2020 which amended and completed certain normative acts concerning electoral matters. In essence, this legislative act proposed several changes regarding the conduct of the electoral process in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, art. IV of this new law specified a series of measures regarding the hygiene procedures in the polling stations and identified the Ministry of Internal Affairs as the institution responsible for ensuring that the members of the polling stations had access to all the necessary sanitary materials. The law also contained clarifications regarding the conduct of the electoral process abroad. For the first time in Romania’s electoral history, the voting process in the parliamentary elections would take place over a two-day period (Law no. 202/2020, art. I. 1).

The law also stated that in countries where, for safety reasons related to combating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities would not allow polling stations to be set up in the headquarters of diplomatic missions or consular offices (Law no. 202/2020, art. VII). In light of these circumstances, Romanian citizens with the domicile or residence abroad could vote by post – this facility had been granted prior to the pandemic, beginning with the 2016 parliamentary elections (Law no. 288/2015). However, it is notable that this right did not extend to the Romanians back home: the authorities did not provide access to postal voting at national level, not even in view of the elections from December 2020.

Scheduled to take place in late November or early December 2020, the electoral process was not postponed a second time even though the data indicated that the country was undergoing a surge in Covid cases and hospitalizations. However, certain authorities sought to undertake various measures that – if successful – would have had the effect of postponing the elections. In one instance, the President challenged before the Constitutional Court the law on the organization of parliamentary elections, adopted by the Parliament on July 27, 2020 (being of the opinion that in the event of an exceptional situation that would have legally extended the mandate of parliamentarians, the modification of the law would have become problematic and criticized the Parliament for acting discretionary in adopting the legislative act; he argued that, according to the law, it was the Government that sets the date of elections which then brings it to the attention of all citizens by publishing in the “Official Gazette of Romania” with at least 90 days before the election) (Europa Liberă 2020a).

In another case, the independent deputy Adrian Dohotaru (elected on the USR lists in 2016) presented to the Parliament, on October 1, a bill that contained provisions for the postponement of the parliamentary elections until March 2021, on account of the epidemiological context. His argument was based on the idea that people from disadvantaged backgrounds were more exposed to the virus and that by holding elections in December, their access to the voting process would be restricted, which, in turn, would be discriminatory (Europa Liberă 2020b). Along the same line, Marcel Ciolacu, president of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) declared several times that the party was also in favor of postponing the elections. As none of these attempts were successful, the election date remained set for December 6, 2020, as had been established by Government Decision no. 744 from September 3, 2020 (Romanian Government Decision no. 744/2020).

Like many other countries, Romania too adopted special campaigning and voting arrangements, aimed at ensuring social distancing, reducing crowds and, hopefully, lowering the risk of infection. On the issue of the electoral campaign, there had been many debates about the restrictions that should be imposed in order to protect public health. Consequently, a joint Order was issued by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Order no. 1850/157/2020), which contained the following provisions:

- limiting the number of participants to a maximum of 20 for indoor public gatherings and to a maximum of 50 for outdoor meetings;
- limiting to a maximum of 6, the number of people traveling in groups for electoral actions carried out on the street; and
- limiting to a maximum of 2, the people who made up teams for door-to-door campaigning.

Compared to other European countries, the measures taken in Romania were somewhere in the middle of a so-called “restrictions axis”. On one end of the spectrum, in countries like Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, or Poland, the restrictions had not been very drastic (even if in Poland all public gatherings had been banned at some point during the electoral campaign for the 2020 presidential election). In Northern Macedonia, the maximum number of participants allowed to attend public meetings was 1000 (OSCE 2020a: 13); in Montenegro a maximum of 50 people could attend indoor gatherings and 100 outdoor meetings (OSCE 2020b: 11); while in Poland, the number was limited to a maximum of 50 participants, indoor, and a maximum of 150, outdoor (OSCE 2020c: 12). At the other end, authorities banned public events and political rallies altogether: Croatia (OSCE 2020d: 10-11), Serbia (where the campaign was suspended) (OSCE 2020e: 12), but also Poland, between 31 March and 29 May 2020, when public gatherings were officially prohibited (OSCE 2020c: 12).

The measures imposed in the polling stations were the subject of another joint order of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Order no. 2009/166/2020) and concerned social distancing, mandatory masks for all voters entering the polling stations, temperature checks, mandatory use of hand sanitizers, disposable pens for each voter, limited number of people allowed in the polling station (no more than five voters in the voting room).

As mentioned, postal voting was available only for Romanian voters living abroad. Although the expansion of the postal voting would have perhaps allowed for a larger participation, such a measure was not

taken into consideration, most likely due to the fact that it would have been too difficult to implement in a short period of time and would have likely led to further blockages. On the other hand, the experience of Poland, which extended postal voting during the pandemic, shows that such a measure, although extremely useful at first glance, failed to attract voters, being sparsely used (less than 200,000 postal ballots were returned) (OSCE 2020c: 8).

In Romania, the day of the parliamentary elections also came with the relaxation of some measures. Voters were able to travel without restrictions on December 6, 2020, from 05.00 AM until 01.00 AM the next day (Mediafax 2020). This decision sought to facilitate access to polling stations, especially in localities where, due to an incidence rate higher than 6%, freedom of movement was restricted – only a limited number of activities were allowed, and travel was permitted only on the basis of a sworn declaration. As it will be shown below, this decision did not produce the intended effect, with turnout remaining very low.

THE 2020 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA: POLITICAL CONTEXT, ELECTORAL TURNOUT, CAMPAIGN TRENDS

In 2020, both local and parliamentary elections took place in the context of the extraordinary situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, being organized in special conditions, which involved the application, during the election campaign and in the polling stations, of many security measures. Despite the challenges, the electoral process went smoothly, even if the restrictions on freedom of movement affected the conduct of the electoral campaign. In this regard, the report of the OSCE Special Election Assessment Mission to the December 2020 parliamentary elections notes that the elections were “professionally organized”, “competitive” and “fundamental freedoms were respected”, even if they were “marked by political fatigue” (OSCE 2020f: 1). This was due to the fact that over a period of 18 months, Romania had held no fewer than four electoral contests: European elections (May 2019), presidential elections (November 2019), local elections (September 2020), and parliamentary elections (December 2020).

The local elections held on September 27, 2020 were seen as a test run for the parliamentary elections. The turnout was 46,62%, a slight decrease from the 2016 local elections, when the turnout was 48,17% (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority 2016a; 2020a). This decline in turnout should not be seen, however, as a direct effect of the COVID-19

pandemic. It is in line, instead, with a decade long general trend, marked by steadily declining interest in the electoral process.

The turnout for the parliamentary elections from December 6, 2020 was much lower than even that from the local elections held just two months before. Only 31,94% of the citizens voted, marking a new low in terms of turnout in the Romanian parliamentary elections (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority 2020b). Also, the differences between the turnout from the 2016 elections were noticeably higher, in many counties – over 10%. The pandemic context could have played a bigger role than in the case of the local elections (the rate of infection being higher at the beginning of December than at the end of September), but we cannot say its impact was equally major, if we consider the general turnout trend characterizing these elections. Some of the lowest turnout rates were registered in counties where on the day of the elections the cumulative incidence rate, calculated per 1.000 inhabitants, was below the national average. For example, as Table 2 shows, the lowest turnout was recorded in Vaslui county, where the incidence was 2,20‰, the national average being 3,14‰. Other counties where the turnout was below 30% though the infection rate was less than 3‰ were Bacău, Botoșani, Brăila, Caraș-Severin, Iași, Maramureș, Neamț, Suceava, Tulcea. Interestingly, some of the highest turnout rates were registered in the counties with the highest infection rate: Constanța, Ilfov, Sibiu, Cluj, or Brașov.

Table 2. Romanian Parliamentary Elections 2020 and 2016 (Turnout rate + COVID-19 incidence of infections in the election day of 2020)

County	Turnout (%)	Turnout (%)	Infections (cases per ‰ inhabitants)
	2016	2020	
	11 Dec. 2016	6 Dec. 2020	6 Dec. 2020
National average	39.79	31.94	3.14
Bucharest	41.76	30.85	5.80
Alba	39.76	33.84	4.02
Arad	36.53	28.97	4.55
Argeș	40.27	32.47	4.50
Bacău	35.98	27.37	2.52
Bihor	43.61	35.83	3.48
Bistrița-Năsăud	36.66	30.95	2.45
Botoșani	39.13	28.33	2.42
Brașov	39.02	31.22	5.02
Brăila	39.03	29.33	2.89
Buzău	41.78	33.79	1.95
Caraș-Severin	37.22	29.02	2.44
Călărași	37.67	30.43	2.86

Cluj	40.36	32.89	5.58
Constanța	40.64	31.00	7.17
Covasna	38.17	30.63	2.27
Dâmbovița	42.84	32.35	3.20
Dolj	44.50	35.16	2.41
Galați	38.97	29.27	3.40
Giurgiu	41.43	35.66	3.03
Gorj	41.71	35.75	1.20
Harghita	44.58	36.34	1.09
Hunedoara	42.56	32.06	3.29
Ialomița	35.67	25.69	3.20
Iași	34.32	26.23	2.64
Ilfov	41.66	34.23	7.26
Maramureș	31.74	28.31	2.23
Mehedinți	43.18	39.33	2.18
Mureș	38.24	31.02	3.00
Neamț	36.80	28.52	1.53
Olt	46.58	35.78	1.17
Prahova	40.15	29.48	3.60
Satu Mare	34.95	28.60	3.14
Sălaj	43.48	35.41	1.93
Sibiu	37.01	31.02	5.00
Suceava	37.03	28.41	1.65
Teleorman	45.63	35.54	2.25
Timiș	35.28	29.61	3.94
Tulcea	34.86	27.14	3.47
Vaslui	33.03	23.09	2.20
Vâlcea	41.00	32.79	2.47
Vrancea	39.96	32.12	1.74

Source: Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority 2016b, 2020b; Știri oficiale.ro 2020.

In the midst of the pandemic, the election campaign focused more on issues related to the rising rates of illness, the situation of hospital beds, especially those in intensive care units, and the restrictive measures taken by the government: movement restrictions, lockdown of large cities, or markets closure (a strongly contested government measure by PSD and especially by AUR – the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, a nationalist, populist newly formed party). Beyond the issues related to the pandemic, the main political parties rehashed the major economic issues omnipresent throughout all the other previous campaigns (salaries, pensions, infrastructure investments, measures of economic growth and inflation reduction), only few novel themes were addressed.

In its government program for the period 2021-2024, the Social

Democratic Party (PSD) focused on reducing labor taxation, especially for low- and middle-income employees, increasing pensions, doubling child benefits, creating new jobs and increasing investment for regional development and road infrastructure, which would lead over the next 4 years to a decrease of about 20% in the development gap between rural and urban areas (PSD 2020). Following a similar line, the National Liberal Party (PNL) proposed through its government program the creation of over 560.000 new jobs, the highest economic growth in the EU over the next 4 years, with a growth rate of over 6% in 2024, salary and pensions increases, about 1.000 km of new highways and expressways, and a reduction in annual inflation below 2% (PNL 2020). As a social measure in the context of the pandemic, PNL proposed postponing the payment of bank installments until July, 1 2021 and postponing the tax obligations for the next 12 months after the elections. Regarding the electoral reform, PNL reopened the debate about the election of mayors in two rounds and proposed extending postal voting to the national territory. USR-PLUS Alliance also supported the reintroduction of the electoral law on the election of mayors in two rounds. Additionally, in line with the anti-corruption and anti-system discourse, USR-PLUS revisited the issue concerning the 2009 referendum, where a majority of voters decided that the maximum number of parliamentarians should be limited to 300 (it was held in 2009 and its results have yet to be implemented) (USR-PLUS 2020).

More than in any other previous election, the campaign took place mostly online (and mainly on Facebook). As a result, important issues related to economic and social reforms fell into the background, and the debates between the candidates became less and less interesting when considering the issues directly related to the health crisis. In a report on parliamentary election observation, Expert Forum (a think tank set up by experts in administration and public policy) and Observatorul Electoral (a platform that provides information and resources for observers) said the same thing, noting that the political discourse in the election campaign was “largely dominated by the conflict between the parliamentary majority and the minority government and by reciprocal attacks by the parties, to the detriment of the debate on electoral programs” (Krause & Pârnu 2020, 19). This, in turn, further diminished the public interest in the campaign.

It cannot be said, however, that absenteeism was caused only by the COVID-19 pandemic, although it is clear that it factored in the decline in turnout, especially in large cities, where the incidence rate was higher. We can identify other causes behind this phenomenon,

three of which are crucial to our understanding of the issue: a declining trend in turnout in recent years (characterizing especially parliamentary elections), a general disinterest in elections, which citizens no longer perceive as representing a stake in itself, as well as political fatigue – the December 2020 parliamentary elections represented the fourth electoral contest over a brief period of time – just one and a half years – and with each electoral contest, citizen interest in political participation gradually decreased. Table 3 shows the turnout for all presidential, parliamentary, local, and European elections held in Romania after 1990, and it allows us to observe how the parliamentary elections have become, over time, Romania's second order elections: the ones for which the voters show the least interest.

Table 3. Electoral turnout for the local, parliamentary, presidential, and European elections held in Romania between 1990 and 2020

Year	Turnout in local elections	Turnout in parliamentary elections (Chamber of Deputies)	Turnout in presidential elections (first round)	Turnout in presidential elections (second round)	Turnout in European elections
1990	-	86.18%	86.18%	-	-
1992	65%	76.29%	76.29%	73.23%	-
1996	56.47%	76.01%	76.01%	75.90%	-
2000	50.85%	65.31%	65.31%	57.50%	-
2004	54.23%	58.51%	58.51%	55.21%	-
2007	-	-	-	-	29.47%
2008	48.81%	39.20%	-	-	-
2009	-	-	54.37%	58.02%	27.67%
2012	56.26%	41.76%	-	-	-
2014	-	-	53.18%	64.11%	32.44%
2016	48.17%	39.49%	-	-	-
2019	-	-	47.66%	49.87%	51.20%
2020	46.62%	31.94%	-	-	-

Source: Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority 2022.

Analyzing the possible reasons for the low turnout, which was anticipated when it came to the elections of December 2020, Romanian

sociologist Ovidiu Voicu argued that “these elections do not have a real stake, because there is no major difference between PSD and PNL, and URS-PLUS has lost much of its anti-system and anti-elite discourse, it is harder to present itself as a new party” (Europa Liberă 2020c).

In this context, AUR was the unintended beneficiary of the voters’ disinterest, especially of those comprising the traditional electorate of the main political parties. Taking advantage of this favorable electoral context, AUR focused on an election campaign conducted mostly online. The main electoral tool of AUR and its leader George Simion was the latter’s Facebook page, which became the most important communication channel of the party, drawing huge audience figures compared to the Facebook pages of other political leaders (Recorder 2020). Amid the volatile atmosphere that resulted from a combination of unpopular governmental sanitary measures, the widespread exasperation with the pandemic in general, and the restrictive measures that had lasted for more than half a year, AUR centered its political messaging on several topics with great emotional impact: the corruption of the political class, the excessive politicization and inefficiency of state institutions, and, especially, the criticism directed at the main government measures taken during the pandemic – closure of markets and restaurants, traffic restrictions, lockdown. These populist messages had a major impact on voters, distrustful of the political class and skeptical of the idea that the traditional parties can bring positive change. Once all votes were counted, they revealed an unexpected result – AUR obtained 9,08% of the votes and 41 seats in the Parliament. By comparison, two months earlier, in the local elections, AUR had obtained an overall score of less than 1% of the votes.

CONCLUSIONS

Local elections marked a weakening of PSD’s dominance as a result of an election campaign that both PNL and the USR + PLUS Alliance directed almost exclusively against this party. Meanwhile, the parliamentary elections maintained the same downward trend for PSD, however they did not mirror entirely the outcome registered two months earlier. Furthermore, the ruling party, PNL, failed to retain the first place. These elections marked a major decrease in the number of votes obtained by PSD, which lost over 15% of the votes received four years earlier. Thus, although PSD gained the first place in the parliamentary elections (with 28,90% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 29,32% of the votes for the Senate, compared to PNL’s 25,18% for the Chamber of

Deputies and 25,58% for the Senate) (Romanian Central Electoral Bureau 2016; 2020), it was in a visible decline. This was further confirmed when it failed to form a parliamentary majority and a government in the aftermath of the elections, becoming, instead, the main opposition party. The majority was formed by PNL and the USR + PLUS Alliance, which ruled together for a short period of time, the government led by PNL's Florin Cîțu being dismissed by a no-confidence vote on October 5, 2021. As a result, after several days of difficult discussions and negotiations, PNL formed a government alongside PSD, the party against which it had fought in the election campaign less than a year earlier.

Despite all the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought for democracies in general and for the electoral processes in particular, in Romania both electoral contests held in 2020 took place without registering major problems. Even if delays were observed in the decision process, regarding the amendment of some legislative acts, or the adoption of new pandemic-related legislation, the parliamentary elections were held according to schedule, avoiding new political tensions overextending the term of office of the parliamentarians. Beyond the sanitary crisis, the biggest challenge was centered around the imperative to rekindle people's interest in the electoral process, as absenteeism has constituted the main concern in all the electoral processes that Romania organized in the last decades. The drop in turnout in parliamentary elections cannot be, hence, attributed solely to the pandemic situation, since it had been afflicting the electoral contests for a long time. It just so happened that the most significant drop in the last decade and a half was registered with the occasion of the elections analyzed in this study.

It can be argued that, after 1990, every electoral moment in Romania showed, with few exceptions, a decrease in turnout. However, in the case of the parliamentary elections, this decrease was accentuated after 2004, in direct connection with the amendment of the Romanian Constitution (2003) which increased the term of office for the President, from 4 to 5 years. If until 2004, in Romania the parliamentary and presidential elections were held simultaneously, and the turnout remained above 50%, with the amendment of the Constitution, the participation in the parliamentary elections began to collapse. In the parliamentary elections from 2008, the first ones that did not coincide with the presidential elections – the turnout was only 39,20%, the lowest in Romania's parliamentary history at that time. Therefore, this situation confirms the general low interest in this type of elections and a higher interest in presidential and local elections. Most likely, in 2024, when, for the first time after the amendment of the Constitution, the parliamentary and

presidential elections will be held once again at the same time, it will be possible to observe a significant increase in participation rates for the parliamentary elections, given that in Romania, the presidential elections are the ones that have always aroused the greatest interest from voters.

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THE RISE OF A NATIONALIST-POPULIST PARTY IN ROMANIA – THE ALLIANCE FOR THE UNION OF ROMANIANS (AUR)

Abstract

During the last few years, while, in many countries, political leaders and supporters of liberal democracy were facing new and unexpected challenges due to the rise of populist radical right tendencies, Romania seemed to be immune to such temptations. The latest development of the political landscape in other countries from Eastern Europe like Hungary or Poland, apparently, didn't matter either. Therefore, after the downfall of the Greater Romania Party, more than a decade ago, and some other less successful attempts, the far-right side of the Romanian political spectrum remained empty. Things suddenly changed in the 2020 legislative elections when, as a surprise for Romanian citizens, political analysts, and media as well, the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* – an unknown political party with nationalist-populist views – managed to obtain more than 9% of the votes and thus became the fourth largest party in the Romanian Parliament. The aim of the paper is to analyse the main factors that led to this outcome and to observe to what extent the anti-vaccination and anti-restrictions rhetoric promoted by the representatives of the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* during the Covid-19 pandemic enhanced the party's chances to obtain this unexpected result.

Keywords: Romanian politics, Alliance for the Union of Romanians, nationalist-populist, radical right, elections, Covid-19

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, *populist radical right* [PRR] parties have been a constant presence in many European countries, in some cases even participating in governing coalitions and thus influencing the decision-making process (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2020; Krause, Cohen & Abou-Chadi 2022; Mudde 2019). Recent events have increased the impact of the PRRs' main ideas and have provided them with a wider audience. From the "us vs them" paradigm to "corrupted bureaucracy" or "our country first", in the last years, PRR representatives had stronger voices and a significant number of events fueled their need to criticise (Bakker, Jolly & Polk 2020; Bernhard & Kriesi 2019; Rodrik 2021). Some European countries with solid democratic values have helplessly faced the disruption of their political landscape by the emergence or consolidation of dynamic PRR parties. Due to the populist side of their message, the PRR rhetoric became exactly what some European citizens wanted to hear. As a result, a symbiotic relationship developed between politicians and their followers. The latest national elections held across the continent, as well as the European elections from 2014 and 2019 stand as proof of the undeniable influence of PRR parties in Europe (Arzheimer 2018; Ortiz Barquero, Ruiz Jiménez & González-Fernández 2022; Santana, Zagórski & Rama 2020; Schmitt, Hobolt & Brug 2022). More than the typical political party doctrine, the rhetoric of the PRR parties has a unique way of spreading and therefore influencing an impressive number of people. In this regard, social media played a major role in promoting the messages of the PRR actors (Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel 2017; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig & Esser 2017). One of the PRRs' main characteristics, that of criticizing and considering that some people are better or entitled to receive more, worked like a charm for many politicians. In addition, it can be noted that the values of classical liberal democracy face challenges due to the fact that populist, radicalist, illiberal and even authoritarian leaders around the world speak "the same language"; they often support each other, creating a bond and a kind of collaboration that none of the other categories of political parties or even ideologies have (De Cleen 2017; Chrysosgelos 2017, 2020; Destradi & Plagemann 2019; Gherghina, Mişcoiu & Soare 2013; Liang 2016; McAdams & Castrillon 2021). Moreover, some of the issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic have been speculated by the PRR actors. As the populist messages are most of the time based on crosscutting ideas and "grow" on different anxieties of the people, those messages can be better articulated during a crisis. Therefore, the pandemic offered the

representatives of the PRR the opportunity to rally antagonisms between different categories of people and use them for political gain (Bobba & Hubé 2021; Lamour & Carls 2022).

In Romania, after the fall of the *Greater Romania Party* [PRM] more than a decade ago, and in the absence of another significant PRR party, several mainstream politicians have embraced the national-populist and anti-European or anti-establishment rhetoric. This was the case until the December 2020 legislative elections, when the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* [AUR]¹ won over 9% of the votes. The main research question is how a party that was created merely a year before the elections, one that few Romanians had heard of, managed to achieve this percentage, becoming the fourth largest party in the Romanian Parliament. This sudden and unexpected emergence of AUR on the political scene is more intriguing considering that a few months before, in September 2020, in the local elections, the votes that the party had gathered were less than one percent. What changed or what events led to this turnout? These are some of the questions this study will try to answer.

No detailed research papers dealing exclusively with AUR electoral success has been published so far, although political analysts, political scientists and historians have expressed their opinion about this new Romanian political party in various interviews. Most of the information that can be found about AUR has been gathered by reporters and journalists. However, recent articles are providing valuable insights regarding on the one hand the support that many members of the *Romanian Orthodox Church* (BOR) have given AUR during the 2020 electoral campaign (Gherghina & Mişcoiu 2022) and, on the other hand, on how some of the representatives of Roma community responded to AUR's political messages (Pantea & Mişcoiu 2022). Two other articles, the first using data collected by a team of academics during the legislative elections (Stoica, Krouwel & Cristea 2021), and the second presenting a sociological analysis on the 2020 parliamentary elections (Sandu 2020), offer information primarily about AUR's voters and thus highlight some of the reasons that made AUR the fourth largest party in the Romanian Parliament. Therefore, most of the resources used in the preparation of this study are statistics, polls, and elections results. Public speeches, messages posted on social media and interviews given by the party leaders are also an important part of the used material. For the theoretical background on the European PRR parties and the Romanian tendencies

1 The acronym for the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* – AUR means GOLD in Romanian.

to embrace political parties with ultra-conservative and, to some extent, discriminatory views, I will refer to the relevant scientific research in the field.

The paper will begin with a brief description of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, including its leaders and political ideas. After the presentation of some general information regarding the parliamentary elections from December 6, 2020, the study will focus on identifying the main factors that led to AUR getting over 9% of the votes. Moreover, a thorough analysis of the preferences of AUR voters on the one hand, and the political context, the electoral campaign organized by AUR and the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the other hand will allow us to identify the reasons behind AUR's electoral success.

THE ALLIANCE FOR THE UNION OF ROMANIANS

In the evening of December 6, 2020, the day of the parliamentary elections in Romania, and the days that followed, the question asked by most Romanians and many journalists and political analysts as well was: "Who is the Alliance for the Union of Romanians?". This is also the question that I will try to answer before observing the party's performance. For a better understanding of AUR, one should explore at least two directions – the official one, presented by the party's programme and the one suggested by most researchers and analysts based on the public discourses and actions of the party's representatives (Clej 2020; Cochino 2020; Schmitt 2020; MacDowall 2020; McGrath 2020; Pîrvulescu 2020).

The *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* was created on December 1st, 2019, on Romania's National Day, 101 years after the Great Union of Romania. The co-founders of the party are George Simion, a young activist, and Claudiu Târziu, a former journalist with a strong connection to the Romanian Orthodox Church, also known for his involvement in the 2018 referendum on the traditional family in Romania. According to its Political programme, AUR is a conservative party with national and Christian values and the four main pillars of the party are: *family, homeland, faith, and freedom* (AUR 2019). The party representatives claim that the traditional family – consisting of a woman and a man – should be supported and defended and any other formula is not accepted. Moreover, the party's doctrine considers that "gender ideology is a theoretical aberration propagated by Neo-Marxist activists" (AUR 2019). The homeland is seen as an initial hearth, and the population within Romania's borders is only a part of the Romanian nation that in large numbers is abroad. With regard the nation, the landmarks are clear

and somewhat restrictive as well; this concept is defined based on the *ethnocultural* dimension postulating that language, Christian faith, and ethnicity are the main features of those belonging to the Romanian nation. The third pillar – the Christian faith – is presented in close connection with the church, tradition, and nation, as AUR considers that Christian values, symbols of faith and the representatives of the church should benefit from more support. The party's doctrine also recalls the vital importance of freedom in all its forms, which is seen especially as a right through which individuals can manifest their identity and at the same time defend their values (AUR 2019). Although I do not aim at providing an exhaustive presentation of the political programme of AUR, three other important ideas that emerge from this document are worth mentioning, as they outline the official vision of the party: the Union with Bessarabia, the sceptical position toward the European Union and the anti-establishment position. Also, the party leaders present themselves as the only true representatives of the people and the only ones fighting for the freedom and welfare of the entire nation (Simion 2020b). However, even some of the party members (Lavric 2020) and the party programme tell a different story; although other references may be identified within that political document suggesting the party's uncompromising position, one paragraph particularly draws attention:

“Our alliance openly declares itself against any form of contemporary Marxism. Currents of political correctness, gender ideology, egalitarianism or multiculturalism are disguised forms of the Neo-Marxist plague. We cannot discuss with those who, under the false front of the fight against discrimination, end up destroying the hierarchies and values that centuries of tradition have raised with patience and love” (AUR 2020).

In terms of the main theoretical characteristics of the PRR parties, AUR meets most of them: the ultranationalist message complemented by a refractory attitude toward certain ethnic, religious, or sexual groups other than the majority, populism expressed through anti-establishment statements, authoritarian tendencies, Euroscepticism, charismatic leadership, and a strong social media campaign. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, like other European PRR parties, AUR has embraced a vehement anti-restriction and anti-vaccination discourse. A specific feature of the PRR Eastern European parties, also seen in AUR, is the particular importance attached to the Christian religion, in our case to the Orthodox Christian faith and, by extension, to the Church and priests. This characteristic was also a defining feature of the Romanian extremist movement in the interwar period, namely the Legionary Movement, also

known under the name of its paramilitary organization – the Iron Guard. This is one of the reasons why some analysts have considered AUR a neo-legionary movement (Clej 2020; Schmitt 2020; Pîrvulescu 2020).

THE RESULTS OF THE DECEMBER 2020 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The parliamentary elections of December 6, 2020 were held after a period of increased political instability. During the last parliamentary term, besides the fact that the country was governed by four prime ministers, two of whom were removed by a no-confidence motion, large demonstrations of citizens took place, the largest since 1989². In addition, the frustrations, and dissatisfactions of a part of the population were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic that began in Romania in March 2020. It is important to emphasize that only 31,84% of the voting population participated in the elections of December 6, 2020 (Permanent Electoral Authority [AEP] 2020a), the lowest percentage since 1989, the main reasons being precisely the acute dissatisfaction of the population toward politicians and state authorities and, to a lesser extent, the pandemic. After the general elections five political parties or alliances entered the Parliament, none of which had a high enough electoral score to guarantee its participation in the government. According to the results, the first place was occupied by the *Social Democratic Party* [PSD] with 29,32% for the Senate [S] and 28,90% for the Chamber of Deputies [CD], followed by the *National Liberal Party* [PNL] with 25,58% S and 25,18% CD, the *Save Romania Union* [USR] - *PLUS Alliance* with 15,86% S and 15,37% CD, the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* with 9,17% S and 9,08% CD, and the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania* [UDMR] with 5,89% S and 5,74% CD (Central Electoral Bureau [BEC] 2020a; 2020b).

The surprise of the elections, as perceived by most Romanians, analysts, and the national and international press alike, was brought by AUR, as they managed to collect more than 9% of the votes (Preda 2021, 72-73). The result is even more surprising as AUR got less than 1% in the local elections (BEC 2020c), and most of the polls before the

2 In a number of protests – including the largest in the post-December 1989 period, at the beginning of 2017, attended by hundreds of thousands of people, about 600.000 people in the entire country: 300.000 in Bucharest and tens of thousands in the largest cities of the country – and also through manifestations of the diaspora, Romanians in the country and abroad showed their indignation about the corruption of the political class and implicitly about the negative repercussions it had on the population.

parliamentary elections did not consider the party. Polls that included AUR did so quite late, some of them days before the election, and the score assigned to this party was around 3-4%, a score that would not have allowed its entry into Parliament. Although the analyses and polls regarding AUR voters – like the ones conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy [IRES], Avangarde Socio-Behavioral Studies Group in collaboration with the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology [CURS], or IRSOP Market Research & Consulting – did not agree on all aspects, they nevertheless give us an overview of the electorate who chose this party (Jurcan 2020; Bechir 2020; Pora 2020; Pricop 2020). Thus, according to such analyses, AUR voters were mainly men, younger, with medium or low education levels, with a conservative view, religious and Eurosceptic. In terms of location, AUR recorded higher percentages in certain localities in Moldova and Transylvania, and, in the diaspora, it was first in the preferences of Romanians in Italy and Germany.

The studies show that, from a sociological point of view, around 40-50% of AUR voters were young men up to the age of 35 and only 6% of the category over 65 (Jurcan 2020); many of them had at most high school or post-secondary education, and only 8% had higher education; they generally belonged to somewhat developed communities, but which were at the same time relatively isolated from large cities (Sandu 2020). From an ideological perspective, AUR voters, according to their own statements, did not occupy a clear position on the left-right political spectrum, but in terms of conservative-progressive orientation, they were very conservative. Even from an economic point of view, their views were not very clear; it can be said that, economically, they tended to the moderate left. As for the relation to the EU, AUR voters considered that, in general, EU integration was not a beneficial thing for Romania, claiming that Romania was treated differently within the Union (Stoica, Krouwel & Cristea 2021). Regarding the previous political options of AUR voters, there are opinions according to which certain communities that voted consistently in favour of this party would have voted in the local elections with PSD, PNL or Pro Romania (Sandu 2020). Moreover, research shows that around half of AUR voters either did not vote in 2016, were not of voting age, or voted for small parties that did not enter Parliament (Stoica, Krouwel & Cristea 2021).

In the areas where AUR stood higher than its national average, it seems that the party representatives attracted the conservative and religious electorate with an anti-Hungarian view from Transylvania and the religious one with a unionist view from Moldova (Bechir 2020). At the same time, studies have shown that AUR received more votes

in Romanian communities with a large number of citizens having left for Italy. The explanation found by specialists was that Romanians who went to work abroad influenced their relatives to vote for this party (Sandu 2020).

An important aspect in studying the votes received by this new party is the large number of diaspora voters who voted for it. Thus, AUR placed on a remarkable third place in the options of Romanians abroad with just over 23% (23,3% S and 23,24% for the CD) after the USR-PLUS Alliance with more than 32% (32,82% S and 32,59% CD) and PNL which obtained around 25% (25,13% S, 24,93% CD) (BEC 2020d; 2020e; AEP 2020b; Code for Romania NGO 2020a; 2020b). Also relevant is the fact that in two major European countries – Italy and Germany – AUR occupied the first position in the Romanians’ options. Thus, in Italy, the party obtained 35,02% for the Senate and 34,61% for the Chamber of Deputies, managing to outpace the PNL by almost 10%, which obtained just over 25%, and in Germany AUR obtained more than a third of the votes – 35,57% Senate and 35,33% Chamber of Deputies, ranking ahead of the USR-PLUS alliance, which achieved just over 31% (31,21% S, 31,77% CD) Moreover, in most major European states, AUR ranked second; this was the case in Britain, Spain and France (AEP 2020b; Code for Romania NGO 2020a; 2020b).

THE MAIN FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO AUR GETTING OVER 9% OF THE VOTES

On the evening of the election, after finding out the results of the polls which placed AUR in a surprising fourth place, George Simion, the party’s president, summarizing the essence of the electoral campaign of AUR, said: “We are the surprise of this election because Romanians are tired of theft, lies and lack of attachment to national values” (Simion 2020a). Indeed, as we will see next, the *anti-establishment* as a feature of *populism* and the *ultra-nationalism* were the main directions addressed by the AUR representatives in the electoral campaign. There are many factors that led to AUR getting more than 9% of the votes in the December 2020 legislative elections; in my opinion they can be divided into two categories: both external and internal factors, which have created a favourable context for the emergence and evolution of a PRR party in Romania and factors directly related to this new PPR Romanian party, its political strategy and the speeches and actions of the leaders of this party, in essence, how leaders knew how to speculate exactly that favourable context and thus maximize the chances of success of AUR. Because of the

significant changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, the major influence it has had on the success of AUR will be a separate analysis.

Factors that created a favourable context

Regarding the first category of factors, I believe one should start by stressing *the populist radical right trend of recent years* (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2020; Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008; Langenbacher & Schellenberg 2011; Minkenberg 2015; Mudde 2007, 2019; Ortiz Barquero, Ruiz Jiménez & González-Fernández 2022). At both European and global level, it can be seen not only an increase in the number of PRR parties and their impact on domestic policy in various states (Engler, Pytlas & Deegan-Krause 2019; Krause, Cohen & Abou-Chadi 2022), but especially an increase in the influence of the ideas associated with the PRR even outside the political spectrum (Enyedi 2020; Loch & Norocel 2015, 251-254). From accepting and even perpetuating dichotomies, to preferring separation over collaboration, from identifying through differentiation from others to slogans such as “us vs. them” or “the outside evil” (Norocel, Hellström & Jørgensen 2020), the rhetoric of the PRR could be found quite often in the speeches of some important political leaders of the world (Oliver & Rahn 2016; Norris & Inglehart 2019; Plattner 2019; Weyland & Madrid 2019). This type of speech legitimized and at the same time favoured a reshaping of the mentality of important segments of population in democratic states, thus creating a new normality in terms of the way of thinking and behaviour of individuals (Diamond & Plattner 2015; Diamond 2016). For this reason, it was to be expected that part of Romanians, both those living in Romania and especially those living in Western Europe, would be influenced by this trend and, implicitly, become receptive to PRR rhetoric (Gherghina, Mişcoiu & Soare 2021).

Moving on to internal factors, two essential aspects must be underlined, namely the *populist* and the *nationalist* tendencies (Gherghina 2022) that became more visible and nevertheless more influential inside the Romanian political environment of recent years and, furthermore, became the two main pillars that favoured the development of a PRR party. Therefore, in examining the internal factors that facilitated AUR’s electoral success it is essential to analyse the favourable context for the spread of *populism* in Romania (Chiruță 2021; Gherghina, Mişcoiu & Soare 2021; Shafir 2008a; Soare & Tufiş 2019; Țăranu & Pîrvulescu 2022). Although recently there has been no PRR party in Romania, populist attitudes and messages have been present during the whole period after

the fall of communism in 1989. From the right-wing nationalist populism of PRM and its leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, to the populist rhetoric of former Romanian President Traian Băsescu, to the virulent nationalist-populist speeches of PRR politicians such as Dan Diaconescu, leader of People's Party Dan Diaconescu [PPDD] (Gherghina & Mişcoiu 2014), and finally to the populist messages that many mainstream politicians have used to enhance their political gains, populist tendencies have left an important mark on the Romanian political life over the past three decades. Moreover, by promoting populist messages Romanian politicians have cultivated a type of exclusionist attitude that has encouraged ordinary people to do the same. While some of the researchers analysing Romanian populism propose a broader perspective when it comes to examining the evolution of this phenomenon (Voicu, Ramia & Tuftuş 2019), there are studies that highlight the crucial influence that anti-corruption discourse has in explaining the rise of the overall populist tendencies (Kiss & Székely 2021; Mungiu-Pippidi 2018). Regardless of which approach one considers appropriate, recent studies conclude that populist tendencies have strong roots inside Romanian society, and, in my opinion, these tendencies played a major role in the establishment of a new PRR party in Romania.

The dissatisfaction of the population with the political class, in general, and the governing authorities, in particular, had a significant influence on electorate's migration to the radical right. Several surveys have shown a part of the Romanians do not trust either politicians or state institutions and in their opinion the situation is getting worse. A survey conducted between April and May 2019 shows that 76,4% of Romanians believe the country is heading in the wrong direction, most Romanians being worried about the situation in the country, as follows: 84,2% are concerned about the level of corruption and 73,7% about the differences between rich and poor people. Moreover, regarding the trust in state institutions, the same survey shows that most Romanians trust the Army – 67,9% and the Church – 56,8%, with confidence in political institutions and organizations being extremely low: Government – 12,4%, Parliament – 9,8% and political parties – 8,9% (INSCOP Research 2019). Thus, one of the main factors that propelled AUR into the voters' preferences was *the anti-establishment position* adopted by the party (Gherghina, Ekman & Podolian 2021; Popescu & Vesalon 2022). It was to be expected that in a country where trust in politicians and state representatives is low, anti-establishment messages would be appreciated by the population. This type of message helped also USR in the previous elections (Dragoman 2021), those of 2016, to get many votes, although it addressed a different

electorate, one with a predominantly urban and a high education level. It can be observed that the critical discourse on the mainstream politicians and the precarious functioning of the state system has been and will continue to be appreciated by the dissatisfied population regardless of their level of education or social status.

At the same time, another important element in the surprising percentage of AUR in the elections was the fact that it was a *new party*. The same discontent and revolt of voters led them to trust a new party instead of the traditional ones whose practices they had grown tired of (Cochino 2020). The position of AUR was similar to the one held by the USR in the previous elections when this party, although created only a few months before the elections and without a national structure, managed to instill hope to a large part of the electorate.

Another explanation for the Romanians' receptivity regarding PRR messages is the *lack of a party that would capitalize on the votes of nationalist conservatives* for whom respect for *Christian values* is very important. *Nationalism*, understood as patriotism, had a catalytic role in the formation of the Romanian state, so many Romanians see the importance of cultivating this feeling. Therefore, in the hands of politicians, nationalism can become a weapon used to increase popularity and sometimes even to discriminate. Well-known examples in Romanian history are the extremist interwar nationalism and the nationalist tint given to communism by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the latter part of his dictatorship (Copilaș 2015). Without the violent tendencies of the past, nationalism continued to be invoked by most politicians after 1990. Among the most vehement parties was the PRM, mainly through the voice of President Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Thus, although there were politicians who continued to come before the electorate with nationalist messages, after the decline of the PRM, there was no relevant party in Romania with a nationalist doctrine. Understood in a positive sense or not, nationalism has influenced and continues to influence an important part of Romanians, making them receptive to nationalist messages from politicians. A survey conducted in 2018 showed that almost half of Romanians (48%) believed that "nationalism is a necessary movement for Romania" (IRES 2018). A few months after the elections, in March 2021, a similar poll showed that 66,4% would vote for a nationalist party that promotes Christian values and supports the traditional family (Strategic Thinking Group [STG] and INSCOP Research 2021). Therefore, AUR, officially promoting the nationalist discourse, was expected to win the votes of an important segment of the population.

Complementary to the nationalist propaganda, AUR promoted

the unionist message advocating for the union of the historical region of Bessarabia with Romania. Currently, this region forms an independent state – the Republic of Moldova. Although there are very few Romanians who really believe in this Union, most of them still consider the Moldovans to be Romanians, hence the positive echoes of the unionist message among the population.

In close connection with nationalism, in the nativist and restrictive sense of the word, lies the *Eurosepticism*. Although manifested by a part of the electorate, Eurosepticism was not integrated into the doctrine of any party, instead, it was used conjecturally by various politicians. More than nationalism, Eurosepticism was used in PSD's campaign messages, especially by the former leader of this party Liviu Dragnea. However, with his arrest³, in an attempt to delimit from the former president, the PSD's Euroseptic message also faded, and the opposition to the European Union [EU] almost disappeared. As evidenced by the surveys and statistics developed in recent years, part of Romanians is still hesitant about certain aspects of the EU. A survey conducted in early 2021 shows that almost a third of Romanians are quite reluctant about the EU and Western alliances. Thus, 35,2% of Romanians consider that Romania's accession to the EU has brought rather disadvantages; 29,3% believe that, although it is a NATO Member, in case of an aggression, Romania would have to defend itself, and 32,1% believe that over time Western countries have done more harm to Romania (STG and INSCOP Research 2021). In the years before the emergence of the AUR, this electorate did not find a political party that confirmed and encouraged its concerns regarding the EU and a certain type of behaviour of Western states.

The ecologist message was also present in the AUR's campaign. However, it was not a message that would develop the main topics related to climate change issues, which AUR representatives do not consider to be genuine, but was a mere extension of the nationalist discourse. Thus, forests were considered to be one of Romania's greatest natural treasures, which was why massive forest cuts were seen as a threat to

3 Liviu Dragnea, a social-democrat politician with conservative views, who has held high-ranking official positions since 1996, was also president of the Social Democratic Party and president of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies between 2016 and 2019. After PSD won the 2016 legislative elections with more than 45% of the votes and became the main party in the governing coalition with a large majority in Parliament, Liviu Dragnea sought to change legislation on certain offences to make them less harshly punished. This course of action was strongly criticized by many Romanian citizens at home and abroad, as well as by representatives of the European Union institutions. On May 27, 2019, Liviu Dragnea was convicted and sentenced to three and a half years in prison for abuse of office.

national well-being. As one may observe mainly from their Facebook pages, AUR representatives stressed that this widespread phenomenon was fostered by the negative role of foreign companies, which, in their opinion, were tacitly supported by certain state representatives.

Relevant in studying the reasons that led to the electoral success of AUR are also *the intolerance tendencies* within the Romanian society. Studies show that similar tendencies are registered in other European countries too (Kende & Krekó 2020). The decline of the PRM more than a decade ago was not due to the change in Romanians' mentality or at least to the significant decrease in intolerance trends, because, as most of the research in the field shows, it has remained quite high (Andreescu 2015, 251; Cârstocea 2021; Cinpoș 2013, 169-171; 186-188; Cinpoș 2015, 286; Soare & Tufiș 2019; Shafir 2008b). According to a recent opinion poll, the phenomenon of discrimination is perceived as a problem by most of the population (71%), and a third say they have experienced the phenomenon of discrimination from direct experience. It was also found that fear of what is different manifests itself in a high level of mistrust especially in homosexuals (74%), Roma (72%), immigrants (69%), Muslims (68%), people with HIV AIDS (58%), people of other religion (58%), Hungarians (53%) and Jews (46%) (IRES 2018). In conclusion, the data analysis shows that discrimination in Romania is predominantly defined by homophobia, but there are also significant nuances of xenophobia, chauvinism and anti-Semitism.⁴ Official documents submitted to the Romanian authorities by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – Council of Europe (2018), the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2021) or the United States Embassy in Bucharest (2019a; 2019b) also point out that the relevant institutions should use a different approach in dealing with specific problems faced by particular categories of people living in Romania. These are some of the reasons why the position officially assumed by AUR – that of having reservations about certain groups based on ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, and at the same time blaming political correctness – was well received by a part of the electorate.

4 The data analysis of the opinion poll conducted by IRES was carried out by the National Council for Combating Discrimination [CNCD] and the Institute for Public Policy of Bucharest [IPP] as part of the Project "10 Years Implementation of EU Framework Decision on racism and xenophobia in Romania: challenges and new approaches regarding hate crime actions – NoIntoHate2018" funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

Specific factors related to AUR's political strategy

It can be observed that AUR's representatives sought to cover every major political issue that had been insufficiently addressed. The reasons examined above, namely the lack of a party that would officially assume certain positions and thus put into words some discontents and tendencies of a part of the population, basically created the favourable context for the emergence of a PRR party. In these circumstances, I chose to include in the second category the factors related to the way in which AUR leaders have exploited this favourable context. This was generally achieved through a well-designed and extraordinarily executed election campaign. In my opinion, the specific aspects of the campaign represent the second category of factors that include: promoting AUR messages in most major cities in Romania, an approach supplemented and maximized by a strong social media campaign, the use of short, clear and repetitive messages, and last but not least, the delivering of these messages by a persuasive leader – George Simion – and other vehement leaders, very active both in the public space at meetings and protests, but also in the virtual space. The charisma of George Simion, as in many other cases of PRR leaders (Eatwell 2006; 2018; Michel, Garzia, Ferreira da Silva & De Angelis 2020), has gain for the party the attention of the Romanian public and brought AUR more supporters.

There are numerous controversies regarding the electoral campaign of AUR, a series of hypotheses were launched regarding who developed the campaign strategy and especially about who financed the electoral campaign of AUR (Despa & Albu 2021; Isăilă 2020; Schmitt 2020). Since there is no concrete evidence to support these assumptions, I will not develop this topic in the paper.

AUR representatives, led by leader George Simion, took a tour of Romania in a real marathon, in an attempt to reach as many localities as possible to send the AUR message directly to the population. Between October 28 and November 24, 2020, the AUR Caravan managed to reach all the counties of the country and campaign in almost all the major cities of the country. This way of campaigning, although appreciated, could not have achieved the desired result because of the effectiveness of larger parties such as PSD and PNL, very well trained in this type of campaign. Thus, like other PRR actors (Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel 2017; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig & Esser 2017; Krämer 2017), AUR had a *strong campaign on social networks*. From short messages to photos and videos, AUR leaders were featured during speeches or when they were participating in various actions. Through thousands

of shares, tens and even hundreds of thousands of likes and views, the messages transmitted by AUR have gone viral. Present day after day in different parts of the country, participating in most of the protests during that period and posting constantly, AUR representatives managed to cultivate and maintain a close relationship with the targeted electorate. Journalistic investigations carried out a few days after the general election showed the magnitude of the organization of AUR's campaign on social networks. From creating videos that went viral to smart targeting and using the Nation Binder software, George Simion said they were able to build their own bubble. Moreover, as both George Simion and the campaign leader of AUR stated, they did not remain stuck in certain initial party messages. The complaints heard during direct meetings with citizens became campaign messages and thus people felt listened to (Popescu 2020; Simion 2020b). The massive online campaign also brought them the advantage of transmitting their message much easier to those in the diaspora.

An analysis of the official Facebook pages of the main Romanian politicians during the last three months before the general elections shows that George Simion led by far, with over 3 million interactions in September, 2.4 million in October and 2.5 million in November. These figures are relevant because the AUR leader was followed very far by the image vectors of the big parties who – except for Gabriela Firea from PSD, who reached 1 million interactions for a very short period in September – only had a few hundred thousand interactions, not exceeding 500,000 (Recorder 2020; Simion 2020b). Moreover, the existing data shows that compared to other political competitors, the AUR leader achieved that performance with much less funding for his Facebook page.

Also, considering the very low score recorded in the local elections, below 1%, AUR was considered a party of no relevance and therefore mainstream media did not give them the opportunity to present their political platform (Szabó, Norocel & Bene 2019) or take part in the electoral debates broadcast on television channels. This aspect was speculated by AUR's representatives who declared that they were wronged or even censored precisely because others did not want their message to be heard by the citizens (Simion 2020b). At the same time, the participation and even the organization of numerous protests long before the creation of AUR gave George Simion and other AUR leaders such as Claudiu Târziu, the necessary training in both strategy and campaign execution. Moreover, oratory talent and persuasion gave AUR leaders credibility in front of voters. As mentioned before, AUR's representatives took advantage of the discontent of the population, translating it into anti-

establishment messages. The party leaders thus outlined some clear and very effective messages that covered a wide range of voter discontent. As one may observe from their Facebook pages, the language used by AUR leaders, especially by George Simion and by one of the most vocal members of the party, Diana Șoșoacă, was quite harsh on the mainstream politicians. Some of the phrases they used were the “political mafia”, the system was considered to be “abject”, politicians – “corrupt”, “country traitors”, “incompetent”, “robbers”, and political parties – “traitors”.

The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic

As research papers are showing, the Covid-19 pandemic had different impact on PRR parties; while some parties, mainly those governing, were negatively affected (Wondreys & Mudde 2022), others gained support during the last years (Bobba & Hubé 2021; Lamour & Carls 2022). When not in government or in governing coalitions, the PRR actors’ antagonistic views and, in some cases, their discriminatory messages were better promoted during the crisis the pandemic created. Due to the uncertainties and even anxieties of that period, people were more likely to listen and approve political messages that were mainly criticizing the authorities. This type of anti-establishment approach that AUR also had at the beginning of the pandemic influenced the party’s result. Furthermore, what needs to be analysed, are the methods and actions by which the party’s representatives managed to generate significant support from the electorate. Indeed, all the elements analysed previously, from the favourable context to the energetic way of campaigning, influenced to a greater or lesser extent the placing of AUR in the fourth place in the elections. Moreover, what appears to have helped AUR decisively in the campaign was the position taken by party representatives on the Covid-19 pandemic. This aspect is very important because no other Romanian political party has officially positioned itself against the restrictions. Obviously, from a political perspective, the opposition parties, especially PSD, challenged the government’s decisions, but this challenge concerned certain decisions and, more specifically, how the government decisions were applied during that period, and not the imposition of a set of restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus.

Regarding AUR’s position on the Covid-19 pandemic, three elements appear to be relevant: (1) the context given by the reluctance of many Romanians regarding restrictions, vaccination and even the existence of the virus; (2) the anti-system position of AUR which could be fully exploited at a time when the state authorities did not have a clear

strategy on how to address the problems arising from the pandemic and, last but not least, (3) the relationship established between AUR leaders and some important representatives of the *Romanian Orthodox Church* (BOR) during the campaign, a collaboration based on almost identical opinions and statements regarding the pandemic.

Given that the vaccination campaign only began in Romania on December 27, 2020, and a survey conducted in mid-January 2021 shows that almost a third of the population was reluctant to vaccinate – 9% of the population did not want to get vaccinated, and 22% said they would “definitely” not get vaccinated (IRES 2021) – it made sense that the anti-vaccination speech would bring additional supporters to AUR. The critical discourse on the authorities also had the expected success given that the rulers did not have a coherent and effective strategy that would lead to the mitigation of the harmful effects of the pandemic. Moreover, the poor state of hospitals, also blamed on the authorities, helped shape the powerful anti-establishment message of AUR (Popescu & Vesalon 2022).

An essential impact in the unexpected growth of AUR in the preferences of the electorate was the connection established during the electoral campaign between the party leaders and some of the representatives of the BOR (Gherghina & Mişcoiu 2022; Simion 2020b; see also: Stan & Turcescu 2007; Stan & Turcescu 2011). It had been observed also that across Europe the link between religion and some of the PRR actors is becoming more visible due to the emphasis that members of those political organisation are putting on religion in order to gain electoral support (Marzouki, McDonnell & Roy 2016; Schwörer & Romero-Vidal 2020). With the BOR initially reluctant to adopt a clear official position on the Covid-19 pandemic and implicitly on restrictions, a major impact in the public space was held by sceptical and very vehement positions of some representatives of the BOR regarding the restrictions and vaccination. A conjectural relationship of closeness was established between a part of the future members of AUR and certain representatives of the BOR during 2018 the *referendum for the traditional family*⁵ (Cinpoieş 2021; Gherghina, Racu, Giugăl, Gavriş, Silagadze &

5 The 2018 *referendum for the traditional family* was initiated with the intention to change the Romanian Constitution to define *the family* as the exclusive union between a man and a woman; in other words, to ban the same-sex marriage, a topic not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. During the referendum campaign, representatives of the BOR, certain NGOs and civil organizations all tried to convince as many voters as possible to attend the referendum in order to change the legislation. In Romania, for a referendum to pass, at least 30% of the registered voters must participate (Romanian Parliament 2000). With a turnout of 21,1% the referendum

Johnston 2019; Mărgărit 2019; Norocel & Băluță 2021; Soare & Tufiș 2021), a referendum for which orthodox priests have waged a real door to door campaign in an attempt to persuade the faithful of their parishes to support the traditional family by voting. It was exactly what Claudiu Târziu did through the NGO he was running⁶. What led them to close collaboration, however, was the similar stance on the pandemic of some of the BOR representatives and AUR members. The resemblance of their views even led some priests to campaign for the AUR (Gherghina & Mișcoiu 2022). Studies show that some of the traditionalist priests shared with the member of this political party not only common opinions on the pandemic, but also on several other political issues. For example, when interviewed, some priests expressed concern about the existence of anti-clerical attitudes in Romanian society, and said they were disappointed with the mainstream parties for neglecting the Church; they also declared that they perceived the EU as a threat to traditional values and the Romanian way of life (Gherghina & Mișcoiu 2022).

Close to the election campaign, the restrictions, which had been partially lifted during the summer, were put back into practice. And if in March the lack of information and the shock of the pandemic caused most of the population to be circumspect and adopt an expecting position, in the autumn, after more than six months since the start of the pandemic in Romania, things were totally different, so some of the population was no longer willing to compromise. This was the context speculated by the AUR leaders who participated and, most of the time, they themselves organized anti-restriction protests. Furthermore, in order to maximize their chances in front of the electorate, AUR representatives also tried to win points in terms of image. Thus, AUR leaders began to display almost ostentatiously, in their public outings and campaign posters, both their nationalist views, by wearing the national costume and the Romanian flag, and the Christian faith, by using the cross and icons, and by numerous visits to different churches.

During the electoral campaign, there were also three great

did not pass (BEC 2018).

- 6 The 2018 *referendum for the traditional family* was initiated with the intention to change the Romanian Constitution to define *the family* as the exclusive union between a man and a woman; in other words, to ban the same-sex marriage, a topic not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. During the referendum campaign, representatives of the BOR, certain NGOs and civil organizations all tried to convince as many voters as possible to attend the referendum in order to change the legislation. In Romania, for a referendum to pass, at least 30% of the registered voters must participate (Romanian Parliament 2000). With a turnout of 21,1% the referendum did not pass (BEC 2018).

Christian holidays, which are traditionally accompanied pilgrimages attended by tens of thousands of believers: October 14th Saint Paraskevi – pilgrimage to Iasi, October 26th-27th Saint Demetrius – pilgrimage to Bucharest, November 30th Saint Andrew – pilgrimage to Constanta. With the increase in infections and the number of deaths caused by the virus, these pilgrimages were prohibited for people who did not live in the cities where these religious processions were to take place (National Emergency Committee [CNSU] 2020, Romanian Government 2020); these decisions created an obvious rift between the state position and the wishes of the priests and implicitly the wishes of a part of the population. Thus, during that period, AUR representatives, especially the lawyer Diana Șoșoacă and the two co-presidents, George Simion and Claudiu Târziu, tried to present themselves as the only defenders of the faithful (Reman 2020). Even the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who, until then, had been quite reserved in rejecting the restrictions, classified the banning of pilgrimage to Saint Paraskevi for believers who did not live in Iasi as: “a disproportionate, discriminatory measure taken without prior consultation with the BOR” (Basilica.ro 2020). A statement of Claudiu Târziu, from October 12, posted on his Facebook page, summarized the situation created by the banning of pilgrimages and underlined AUR’s position:

“The Romanian Orthodox Church must understand that, at this moment, it no longer has any partner on the first political scene of the country and, implicitly, neither in the state structures. I am referring both to the institution of the Church and to the Community of believers. The Church must find an ally. And the only natural, honest, and likely to get on the first stage is the Alliance for the Union of Romanians.”

And indeed, the only party that officially assumed the Church’s position on pilgrimages was AUR. It was also the representatives of this party who organized protests in which they challenged the decisions on the remaining restrictions. Moreover, the lawyer Diana Șoșoacă offered her services and even defended in court believers and representatives of the Church in various trials with the state, which were based on challenging the restrictions. A famous case was the lawsuit filed against the state by Teodosie Petrescu, the Archbishop of Tomis, in which he challenged the prohibition of pilgrimage to St. Andrew’s Cave for those who were not from Constanța; the lawyer hired by the archbishop was Diana Șoșoacă. Thus, if the use of national and Christian symbols by AUR representatives during the campaign brought them notoriety and distinguished them from the rest of the politicians, the defence of a high

representative of the BOR by and AUR member in a lawsuit against the decisions of the state, a process that concerned the rights of the faithful, had a strong echo among some of the Romanians. Moreover, the images of the two coming and going from the Court in Constanța and especially the interviews given by them at the exit from the Court, which were broadcast by all the important Romanian TV stations, have become viral (Zagoneanu & Bușurică 2020). Those images were very powerful and showed the entire country an AUR leader and a high representative of the BOR who sent the same message, that they were on the same page and also that they were the only defenders of the rights and freedoms of the Romanians.

CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the preceding arguments, it must be said that a careful pre-election analysis of the previously detailed issues would have determined that, if not AUR, another party with a PRR-specific message could have obtained significant electoral support. But it is due to the abilities of AUR leaders to have been able to speculate on each of the issues outlined above, through meticulously executed political strategy. If one looks closely at how the campaign went, it can be observed that the promises that normally make up most of a party's messages, were quite rare in the case of AUR. Even when they appeared in the speeches of the representatives of this party, the promises were exaggerated and almost impossible to achieve. Therefore, I consider that AUR's campaign can be seen as a long series of protests; at the same time, one can notice a vehement challenge of the system by AUR leaders, who accused the elected politicians of the precarious situation that the country was going through. As it was observed, the Covid 19 pandemic helped AUR and a significant aspect that brought its success was the close relationship established with some of the BOR representatives during the electoral campaign. By dressing up most of the time during the campaign in traditional costumes and pretending to be the only true Christians, the only ones who cared about both the people and the Church, the party leaders managed to create for a part of the electorate the illusion that they were the only viable political choice.

Regarding the general tendencies of the AUR electoral campaign, it should be noted that, with simplified speeches focused on issues important only to a part of the common people, its leaders often proposed solutions that went beyond the limits of the principles of liberal democracy. It can also be seen that some of the high-ranking members of the AUR tried

to use the problems faced by Romanians for political gain. By choosing to pursue and exploit the various dissatisfactions that people had with the representatives of the political parties that ruled Romania in recent years, AUR leaders positioned the party along populist lines and, at the same time, unintentionally emphasized their political opportunism. Their virulent criticism of the governing parties also confirmed their populist agenda. The few solutions that AUR leaders proposed seemed more like a vendetta against the representatives of mainstream political parties and also, as mentioned above, the solutions rarely respected the limits of liberal democratic principles. Ignoring the basic pillars of living in a free society, some AUR members deliberately increased animosity between different categories of Romanians; occasionally, they even promoted a discriminatory approach and tried to “sell it” as the only viable solution. In their speeches, while trying to mask this tendency, AUR leaders showed little respect for the rights and freedom of certain categories of Romanians. Therefore, in the name of religion, nationalism, or the traditional family, they hid their political agenda; moreover, appearing to be primarily concerned with their target electorate, AUR representatives promoted in their speeches a type of restrictive politics and transmitted messages of exclusion that should raise concern about the direction Romanian politics is heading.

On this note, I conclude that it is easier to criticize, condemn and ultimately propose “eradication” than to respect and seek to address the needs of most of those living in a country. In my opinion, it is imperative for the future of Romanian politics that both politicians and voters see beyond the differences and try to find common ground and build, starting from the unifying themes prevalent in society.

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THE IDEOLOGICAL INCONGRUENCE OF NEW POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS: CASE STUDY “MOVEMENT OF FREE CITIZENS” AND “DO NOT LET BELGRADE D(R)OWN”

Abstract

The main subjects of this article are new political parties and organizations and their ideological incongruence as setbacks for root in society and institutionalization. The party system in Serbia has changed in aspects of stability and relevance of political parties. New instability was produced by tendencies of the predominance of one party (Serbian Progressive Party) and losing position of old political parties through splitting, losing of resources and capacities, intraparty instability, etc. Challenges for old political parties are coming from new political parties and organizations based on new and alternative politics. New political parties have many problems with institutionalization in the party system. Some of the problems are in the impossibility to construct distinctive ideological frames which would be recognized by citizens and voters. The problem of the ideological incongruence of new parties is identified also in the relationship between leadership and membership of parties. In this paper, we deal with “Movement of Free Citizens” (MFC) and “Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own” (DLBD) as new political actors. The main goal of the research is to identify and explain ideological incongruence in the above-mentioned political organizations.

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Keywords: new party, party system, Serbia, ideology, ideological incongruence, institutionalization

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1990, the political and party system of Serbia is characterized by distinctive instability and fragility. The party system of Serbia has shifted from a dominant-party system (1990-2000) to polarized pluralism (2000-2008), again to moderate pluralism for a short period (2008-2012), only to go back to the framework of the dominant-party system in the last ten years (2012-2022) (Kovačević 2020a, 361). In a broader context, the political system of Serbia has undergone constant changes, the disintegration of the SFRY created the FRY, only for it to be called Serbia and Montenegro in one phase, until the final status of the Republic of Serbia. Political relations were influenced by the changes in the framework of the state (with the states of the former SFRY), changes within Serbia (unresolved status of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, issues with the autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina), relations with the international community (cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, the negotiation process with the European Union, political relations with the Russian Federation, etc.), war conflicts (NATO bombing in 1999, conflicts in Kosovo and Metohija, Bosnia, etc.) and democratic changes that took place on October 5, 2000. There are several other socio-economic factors, but the parties were constantly divided along different lines of social cleavages that range from complete to partial. Over the years, Serbia has been facing a decline in the value of democracy, especially in the areas of rule of law and freedom of the media (Bieber 2018; Vladislavljević 2019). As in other similar cases, in Serbia, there is a strong personalization of politics with modern trends of party presidentialisation (Orlović 2017), growth of populism (Spasojević 2018; Kovačević 2020b), and a crisis of several relevant parties (primarily ones in the opposition).

Still, the fourth decade of political pluralism didn't bring a significantly enhanced institutionalization of political parties any more than the first decade did. The only party that managed to leave a trace in the first and the second decade of political pluralism, when talking about functionality and respectability of political power, is the Socialist Party of Serbia. All the other parties, from the Serbian Renewal Movement and the Serbian Radical Party, to the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Serbia, have lost their stronghold containing the citizens' support. With that said, the third decade of political pluralism is defined by the

dominant-party system, that of the Serbian Progressive Party. In addition to this party, the Socialist Party of Serbia was the only remaining party that was able to uphold its political power. This kind of system was strongly present in the 2022 April elections.

Besides the dominant-party system, the third and the beginning of the fourth decade of political pluralism can also be characterized by a rising number of political movements with no institutional organization resembling the traditional parties. These movements arose as a reaction to the weakening of the traditionally organized political parties of the opposition, which have repeatedly failed to counter the Serbian Progressive Party during every election in the past 10 years. It was this space that new movements and new political parties were filling out. In that period in time the People's Party, the Party of Freedom and Justice, the Serbian movement Dveri, the Serbian Party Oathkeepers, and the Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia were all created. Moreover, two other movements that are the subject of our analysis were created as well: the Movement of Free Citizens and Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own.

These two movements have a divergent genesis. The Movement of Free Citizens was constructed after the presidential elections in 2017, when the Ombudsman at the time, Saša Janković won 16,2% of the votes as a presidential candidate. The Movement has until this day had three presidents. Saša Janković was replaced by Sergej Trifunović in 2018. Under his presidency, the Movement of Free Citizens took part in the 2020 parliamentary elections and failed to cross the electoral threshold of a minimum of 3% of votes, excluding them from being represented in the parliament. After this failure, Pavle Grbović assumes the presidency the same year. The Movement of Free Citizens, according to its program and ideological documents, is defined as a liberal, democratic, and civil party with a focus on the protection of civil liberties.

Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own movement came to life in 2015 as a protest grass-roots initiative of the citizens of Belgrade, with its focus on criticism of the city authorities in the country's capital. The primary actions of the Movement were focused on urban and infrastructure policies, but have spread to cultural, social, and environmental policies through the years. During the 2017 presidential elections, they supported Saša Janković while winning 3,44% of the votes in the 2018 Belgrade elections, making them ineligible to enter the city parliament. Nevertheless, in three central municipalities (Stari grad, Savski venac, and Vračar) the Movement managed to cross the electoral threshold and achieve a great result in merely three years since it was formed. In

the ideological sense, Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own is a movement that represents the ideas of the Left, with social and environmental policies at their center of focus. As a result, the Movement has gained support from renowned regional and worldwide leftists, gathered around the group DiEM 25, such as Yanis Varoufakis and Srećko Horvat.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Political parties and political organizations assume the role of the medium between the citizens and the institutions. Political parties play a central role in the processes of democratization and institutional design (Van Biezen 2003, 2; Agh 1998, 18). The political game functions on the principal competition among different parties, where the support of citizens comes as a prize. The party system is a product of the relationship dynamics and (in)stability of parties and organizations. A vital role in their mutual differentiation during that game is played by ideology. Ideological positioning represents a complex action because we're at a time where ideology and clear ideological polarization of the political chances are questionable, whereas ideological profiles of the parties and organizations are intertwined.

Due to the influence of various contextual factors, the relevant political parties in several countries have weakened and disintegrated. As a substitute for this, there is a phenomenon of new political parties and organizations entering the political arena with notable results. "Attractiveness of the new" (Krašovec and Haughton 2014) is a phenomenon in which new parties and movements affirm themselves with significant results (often with victories too) in the elections, only to lose much of the support in the inter-election period until the next elections. A paradigmatic example of this is Slovenia, where new parties in power are changing with great instability of the party system (Haughton & Deegan-Krause 2021, Kovačević 2020c), and similar tendencies of destabilization have been noticed in Serbia. As the cause of the incapability of the new parties and organizations to maintain their support and stabilize (institutionalize) themselves, we find their insufficient connection with the citizens and insufficient ideological profiling and incongruence. One of the key assumptions of the institutionalization of parties and party systems is in the value infusion (Selznick 1957; Levitsky 1998, 79; Randall & Svasand 2002, 3), in their roots in society as well as in the internal cohesion and coherence (Basedau & Stroh 2008; Mainwaring 1998). Both of these dimensions are related to the ideological foundation of the party and the organization both on a public (according to voters)

and a private (according to membership) scale.

Ideological incongruence is the phenomenon of ideological differences in the programs of parties and organizations, attitudes of leadership versus ideological attitudes of membership (internally), and attitudes of voters (externally). In this paper, we deal with the internal ideological incongruence between the leadership and the membership of parties and organizations. Ideological incongruence in internal relations in parties and organizations is the subject of analysis in the comparative literature (Kukec 2019; Kölln & Polk 2016; Scarrow & Gezgor 2010; Van Haute & Carty 2012; Widfeldt 1999). The great challenge the new political parties and organizations face lies in the tendency of voters to have ideological congruence at the systemic level. Research has shown that voters in countries where ideological incongruence enhances systematically, voters support new parties to reduce this gap (Van de Wardt & Otjes 2021, 15), thus creating an open space in the system for new political parties and organizations. The appearance of new actors also means that after the first election's success and the support of voters, they are taking up a new challenge to create a sustainable organization that will last and reduce ideological incongruence at the domestic level.

In an attempt to position the Movement of Free Citizens and the Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own movement through basic party program choices, we will be using the Kitschelt model (Kitschelt 2004) which fills in for the traditional scheme and is based on the split between traditional positions (liberalism, social-democracy, conservatism) and new ones (liberal left, new right) (Spasojević & Stojiljković 2020). The Kitschelt model is based on the following axes: political allocation vs. market allocation, liberal-cosmopolitan politics vs. authoritarian-particularistic politics. The previous-mentioned model was updated by other models which precisely identify and question the party positions (Kriesi et al. 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2017).

To gain more voters, parties and organizations start to resemble one another, moving closer to the ideological center and creating ideological compromises of different positions. However, through the analysis of the ideological positions of political parties and organizations, it can be seen that most belong to one of the above-mentioned models, only now relatively closer to the center than ever before. In the party systems, traditional positions have been kept, but new ones have been created as well. The ideological space is antagonized no more, which enables the disregard of the positions. This is a trend specifically carried out in Serbia.

The rise of the new social movement has not led to fundamental changes, but it has left a mark on the already-existing ones (socioeconomic

and cultural axis). The division on the socio-economic axis redefines the division of pro-state and pro-market positions. The first one relates more to state-led protectionism, while the pro-market position is aimed at promoting national economic competitiveness in the world market. On the other hand, the cultural dimension is based on the topics such as traditionalism and the protection of state and national character as a response to cultural liberalism, but also to oppose euro-integrations and migrations (Kriesi et al. 2006). Positioning on this scale is based on a set of questions that helps us assess the ideology of parties and organizations.

This model offers an overview of the ideological positions of the political parties and organizations, however, for this research, it is also important to determine the positions along the lines of partial social cleavages. Although there is a high number of authors that research these questions, when focusing on dominant social cleavages to map these two movements, we use an additional set of questions that refer to the important topics of political life in Serbia. Some of these are attitude towards Slobodan Milošević's regime, attitude towards the October 5th democratic changes, attitude towards the EU, attitude towards the USA, attitude towards the Russian Federation, attitude towards Kosovo and Metohija, attitude towards the migration crisis, attitude towards democracy and human rights, attitude towards state enterprises, attitude towards private entrepreneurship.

Using the before-mentioned models we will illustrate the ideological orientation of the two movements. With those findings, we will focus on the differences and similarities in the idea of ideological positions of the leadership and membership. Through differences between management and leadership regarding questions concerning the ideological orientation of these movements, we will note the ideological incongruence as a challenge to sustainability and the institutionalization of the above-mentioned movements. Also, in explaining the ideological gap between leadership and membership, we rely on the explanatory mechanism of path dependence. Path dependency is a mechanism that shows that the history of a social subject really matters; what has occurred in the past in terms of how social entities were founded, affects how they function today. "The notion of dependence in relation to the path taken highlights the historical dynamic that dictates that once a path is chosen, it is difficult to change it because the processes become institutionalized and are reinforced over time" (Trouvé et al. 2010, 4).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research problem and research question

The dominant-party system and backsliding of democracy have led to grave issues for new political parties and movements in the matter of institutionalization in the Serbian party system. A lot of internal and external “problems” have influenced the genesis of both the Movement of Free Citizens and the Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own movement. However, our research focus in this article is precisely their impossibility to construct distinctive ideological frames which would be recognized by citizens and voters. Their impossibility of reaching such positions leads to the issue of the ideological incongruence in the previous-mentioned political organizations, especially when it comes to the relationship between leadership and membership of parties. The main goal of our research is to identify and explain ideological incongruence in the above-mentioned political organizations. When it comes to the Movement of Free People, ever since its beginnings, its ideological outline was in the shadow of leadership, first by Saša Janković, and then Sergej Trifunović. On the other hand, the voters’ identification with the Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own movement has developed stronger through oppositional and protest activism of the movement regarding very specific issues (e.g., illegal demolition of buildings on Hercegovačka Street), than through the movement’s ideology itself. Considering the issues these two movements have faced, our research question is: What is the state of the ideological incongruence between party leadership and party membership? Also, we are searching for the answer to explaining why this is the case and how this possible difference in the perception of ideological attitudes can be explained. By providing an answer to the research question in this paper we will try to identify the overlapping and the distinctive aspects of the ideological positions of these movements (leadership) and their members.

Methodology

Our general hypothesis is that new political movements and parties have inherent problems in establishing ideological congruence between party leadership and membership. Empirical validation of our hypotheses is based on data that have been acquired using various methods, both quantitative and qualitative. To make a connection between program stances and practical policies, including membership, it was necessary to research the views of the party leadership of these two movements, as well as their membership. For this purpose, the following qualitative

methods have been used: (a) interviews with the political leadership of the movements (four interviews); (b) focus groups with members of the party and organizations (2 focus groups).

With global indexes as role models, to ensure the expert assessment of certain areas, as a corrective measure for the subjective assessments by the party and organization leadership and membership, the following quantitative method has been used expert questionnaire. The expert questionnaire consisted of 65 questions, which referred to the assessment of the ideological positioning of these two movements. Most of the questions were in the form of scales, of the Likert type. A special battery of questions addressed the problem of ideological congruence between leadership and membership. The questionnaire was completed by 6 experts with many years of experience in dealing with political parties, social cleavages, and analysis of political processes.

To analyze the data from interviews and focus groups we conducted ideological discourse analysis, while the quantitative data from expert scores were processed using statistical analysis.

KEY FINDINGS

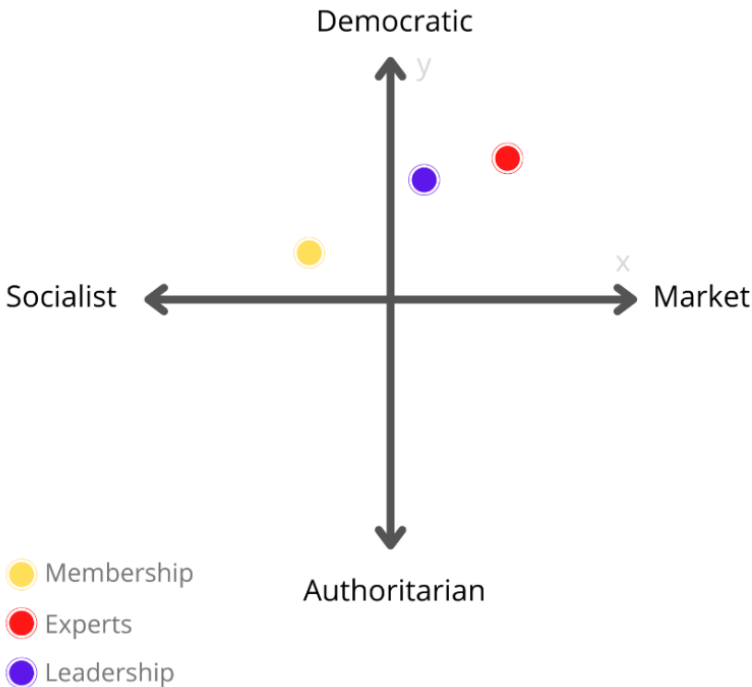
Movement of Free Citizens

Based on the data obtained from the research, we can say that the MFC shows significant ideological incongruence on the socio-economic identification map when it comes to economic issues, while the differences between membership and party leadership are less significant when it comes to socio-political issues. Based on expert scores, we see that the MFC has been assessed by experts as both more market and more democratic about the ideological positions to which the leadership and membership of the movement hold. When it comes to the economy, MFC membership is positioned moderately to the left of the center, while the leadership of the movement is positioned moderately to the right of the center. The MFC economic platform is based on several important stances: (1) a negative attitude toward the existing subsidy policy of foreign companies; (2) investing in education as a precondition for a developing country's economic activity; (3) the role of the state should be limited to fiscal and monetary policy with no involvement in the production process and distribution of wealth; (4) the state should be involved in protecting resources that are of vital national interest; (5) MFC very much favors private initiative because state-owned companies are a permanent source of corruption.

On the other hand, MFC membership has a somewhat different economic worldview, which is primarily focused on issues of economic

and social justice and inequality. For MFC members, the main problems in the economic sphere are the consequences of a poor transition to capitalism and the consequent disappearance of the middle class. They see MFC as one that upholds the values of social democracy. They favor the introduction of progressive taxation. They see state-owned companies as better frameworks for workers seeing as these companies offer several benefits and privileges such as sick leave, paid holidays, working hours, etc. They often take the Nordic countries as an example of an ideologically close economic arrangement. On the socio-economic axis, experts see MFC as a movement that favors market-based allocation of resources, with a reduction in political resource allocation. Experts' opinion differs greatly from those of MFC members and is more in tune with the opinion of the leadership.

Graph 1: Socio-economic axis – Movement of Free Citizens



Source: the author's analysis

When it comes to the socio-political positioning, the MFC leadership, as well as the membership, favors democracy, but the MFC leadership significantly believes that their attitudes regarding the political system are closest to the models adopted by countries with liberal economies and in the political sense they favor elements of social democracy. The advantage of democracy lies in its participatory element which encourages freedom of citizens and their active participation and inclusive impact on various groups. Among other things, the name of the movement itself is based on principles of free citizenship. MFC leadership points out the insufficient level of decentralization in matters of achieving a higher level of political rights for minorities. They favor affirmative actions, especially the inclusion of women in politics. They believe that these measures may not yield short-term results but that they encourage participation and provide long-term effects. When asked about sexual minorities, MFC pointed out a high level of discrimination towards members of this community and that the state needs to be more involved in resolving the existing issues, and that the guaranteed rights of these minorities are not protected in practice. MFC supports the idea of same-sex partnerships.

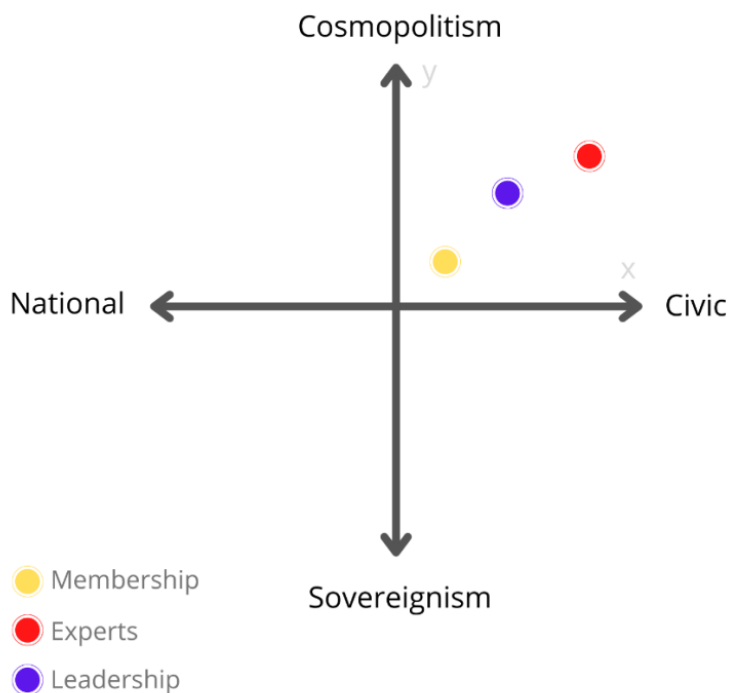
MFC membership stresses that Serbia has good legislation, procedures, and parliamentary system in place, but that they have been usurped by the president, therefore the regime we see today is not democratic. They point out that the current situation calls for a limitation of presidential powers and that it is the institutions, such as the government and the parliament, which should be the real repositories of power. The majority of MFC members associate democracy with equality, followed by the rule of law. The female section of the focus group pointed out that the participation of women is essential in achieving a truly democratic society, and their comments regarding the position of women in Serbia (in the government and parliament) were largely negative. The entire system of representative democracy in Serbia was described as non-democratic and it challenged the legitimacy of the members of the current parliament. Members of MFC do not believe that the rights of sexual minorities are either important or a priority seeing as fundamental human rights are currently under threat in Serbia and that the government is promoting special rights to create a false impression.

The cultural-political axis shows that both the leadership and the membership are in the same quadrant, supporting the civic and cosmopolitan worldviews, with a slightly distinctive belief in civic and cosmopolitanism values among the MFC leadership. These findings are being overestimated significantly by the evaluations from the expert

questionnaires. MFC leadership has adopted an affirmative attitude towards minorities, and they believe minorities are not sufficiently involved in the political processes, especially so on the local level. On the other hand, they maintain that matters of cultural importance are at a satisfactory level - language, education, media, etc. MFC leadership believes that it is only natural to offer support to any group within a society that does not enjoy equal status. The revisionist attitude regarding the democratic changes of 5th October is perceived as an idea of the government vs. democracy. Even though they believe that there was a missed opportunity after the political change, they nevertheless believe that the first three years after the ousting of Milošević represent an important democratic change in Serbia. They underline that the state of play in Serbia during the 1990s is similar to that of today, except that they attribute the improvement in certain areas to civilizational change.

MFC membership opinions toward national minorities and migrants are fairly varied. They range from those based on empathy and understanding of the situation to ideas that they have nothing against migrants in principle but that their long-term stay or settlement in Serbia would become a problem due to cultural differences. MFC members have registered several issues in Serbia's recent political history. They point out that an opportunity was missed after the changes of 5th October, and that the main problem was the failure to purge elements of the old regime, especially that of SPS. They maintain that nothing has really changed and that the old system is still in place. To a large extent, members of MFC remain mistrustful of the majority of opposition parties and their leaders who believe they can change the current system which they describe as criminal and oligarchic.

Graph 2: Cultural-political axis – Movement of Free citizens



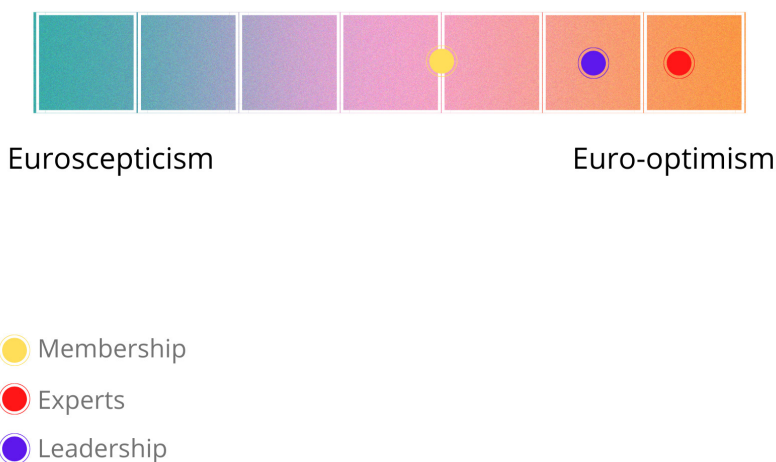
Source: the author's analysis

Findings from the above-shown ideological matrix flow over to issues of international integrations of Serbia, above all the stances on Serbia's entry into the European Union. In matters of political relations and security, MFC leadership believes European integration to be an inevitable process and points out that in matters of the economy the Serbian market has to remain open to everyone. They perceive several problems in the structure of the European Union, primarily the "administrative hypocrisy" reflected in the tolerance of non-democratic events both within and outside the EU. MFC underlines the importance of good relations in the region and in the case of relations with superpowers they do not make any relevant distinction between Russia and the USA.

MFC membership sees the European integration process and EU

membership as the only way forward for Serbia, with a possibility of holding back on the idea due to the changes occurring within the EU. MFC members are not in favor or are openly against cooperation with the Russian Federation due to the bad influence and non-democratic values promoted in the Balkans. MFC members have registered several issues in Serbia's recent political history. They point out that an opportunity was missed after the changes of 5th October, and that the main problem was the failure to purge elements of the old regime, especially that of SPS. They hold that nothing has changed, that the old system is still in place, and that this slows down Serbia's accession to the EU.

Graph 3: EU axis (Euro-scepticism / Euro-optimism) – Movement of Free citizens



Source: the author's analysis

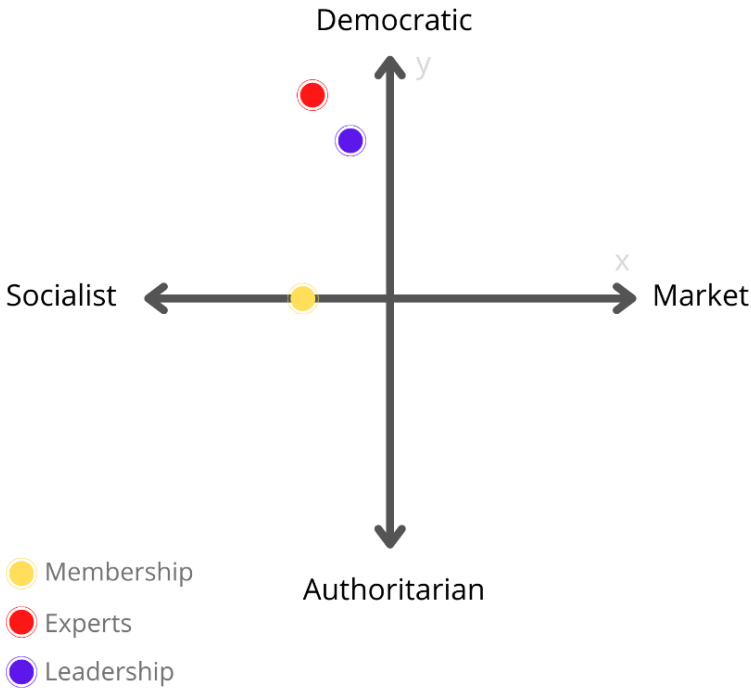
Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own

The insights from the research show that on the socio-economic identification map of DLBD there is no significant ideological incongruence when it comes to economic issues, while the differences between membership and party leadership are somewhat more expressive regarding socio-political issues. In this sense, the membership of the DLBD is positioned around the center, while the leadership of the movement is positioned strongly according to democratic ideological principles. Expert scores somewhat “overestimate” the democratic

principles of the leadership movement. The leadership of DLBD sees the economic system of Serbia as a clientelist one that relies on state resources. The role of the market has been neglected to the detriment of the state as the main producer and supplier. They consider clientelism a systemic problem that is also a product of the position in the system of world capitalism. DLBD leadership believes that most basic living services and systems should be state-owned and that ownership and management issues should be separated. DLBD leadership emphasizes that they are committed to models of more democratic governance that include citizens, organizations, and consumers. They are ideologically closer to systems that do not create market/state dichotomies than looking for a third way in public services, following the example of Latin American countries.

DLBD membership generally agrees with the leadership in their way of thinking when it comes to the economy. The main difference, which can be noticed, is that the membership of DLBD is showing a significantly greater preference for the role of the state in the economy. The state must have its factories and companies, whilst environmental standards must be in front of profit and efficiency. On the socialist-market axis, experts assessed DLBD as a movement that advocates the political allocation of resources, with an important role of the state in the economy. The assessment of experts is largely in line with the opinion of the leadership and the membership. It can be concluded that, as far as economic issues are concerned, DLBD acts as an ideologically coherent organization, but it should be noted that neither the leadership nor the membership has a position on a large number of issues that this local initiative should support.

Graph 4: Socio-economic axis – Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own



Source: the author's analysis

Regarding the political organization of the state, the leadership of DLBD stands for democracy, believing that citizens have a desire to participate and articulate their interests, but that the political elite often abuses democratic mechanisms, which distances citizens from the essence of democracy. DLBD leadership points out the status of women in society as an important social problem, primarily regarding employment, type of work, working hours, and then about participation in political life. The measures with quotas for women's participation are considered positive, but also as a space to cover up real gender inequality, especially at the local level. DLBD is committed to full respect for human and minority rights by supporting all incentives.

The membership of DLBD believes that due to the government's

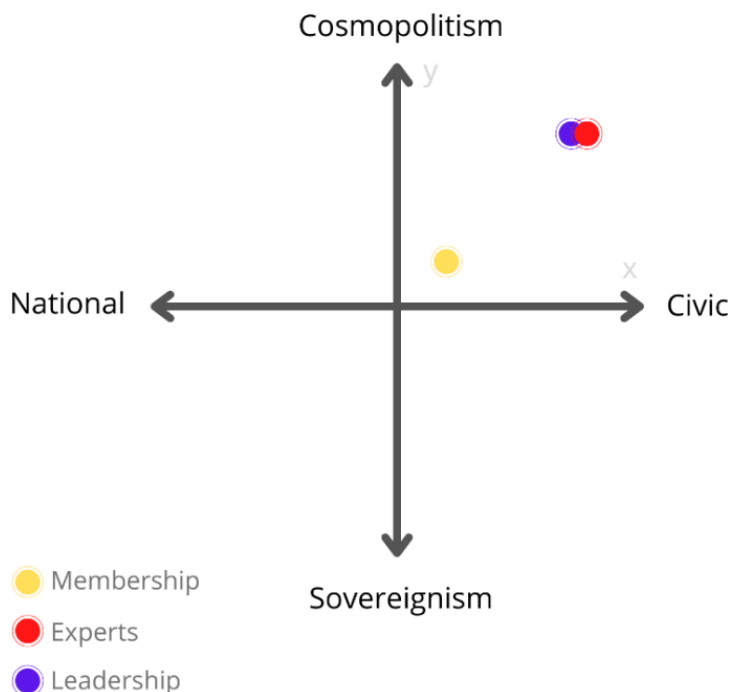
attitude towards the citizens, Serbia is currently a hybrid regime. They mostly point out that they prefer the structure of the northern European countries (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) because they have organized systems of education, health, and important social measures, but also that Serbia and its citizens do not have enough awareness and political culture to build such systems. The views of the DLBD membership regarding democracy and internal organization can be described as opposed, but about the leadership, they are much less inclined toward democracy. In the focus group of the DLBD membership, views were expressed on the need for an honest “strong hand”, a strongman, an individual who will determine the rules by himself, but that such a relationship suits the people in Serbia. Part of the membership emphasized that they do not support democracy at the level of principles, and especially not in Serbia because the people are not ready to talk and reach such an agreement. Although these are individual opinions, it is symptomatic that other members of the focus group largely agreed with the need for a strong leader, especially in times of crisis. Certainly, it is important to point out that some members emphasized their full belief in democratic procedures and institutions, regardless of whether the situation in the country is regular or extraordinary. DLBD membership support measures for the inclusion of women in political processes but points out that there is great discrimination against them in Serbia.

The cultural-political axis shows that, as in the MFC case, leadership and membership are in the same quadrant, supporting civic and cosmopolitanism worldviews. Yet, it is clear that the leadership of the movement is significantly more prone to civic and cosmopolitanism values than the membership. Expert polls are in fair agreement with DLBD leadership positions. When it comes to current and very sensitive topics such as the migrant issue, DLBD leadership sees the best description of the attitude towards migrants in the solidarity and help that emerged with the crisis. They see the phenomena that came after as the idea of the top of the government to spread irrational fears about occupation, taking over the jobs and the country. In addition, DLBD finds the assurance and guarantee of equal rights to minorities as strongly important. They do not see any positive phenomenon in authoritarian regimes, as they describe the regime of Slobodan Milošević. They see the biggest problem in the violation of human rights and economic stagnation, but in the context of Serbia in the last decade of the 20th century, they consider Milošević the main, but not the only culprit. They see the democratic changes of the 5th of October as a necessity, but in the post-5th of October period, they notice the slow development of democracy, the guilt for which they

attribute primarily to the elites, but also to the citizens. They point out that the sovereignty is left to the ruling parties, which have returned it to the citizens with large-scale corruption.

When it comes to the DLBD membership they also support other incentive measures for minorities. They do not see migrants as a problem, but they believe that the authorities in Serbia are comfortable with this situation with migrants so that they would be the dominant topic in public. They are very tolerant and empathetic towards migrants. They see the regime of Slobodan Milošević as a time of catastrophic rule and a great crisis, whilst they see the 5th of October as an inevitability that happened but did not bring the necessary reforms in the later period.

Graph 5: Cultural-political axis – Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own

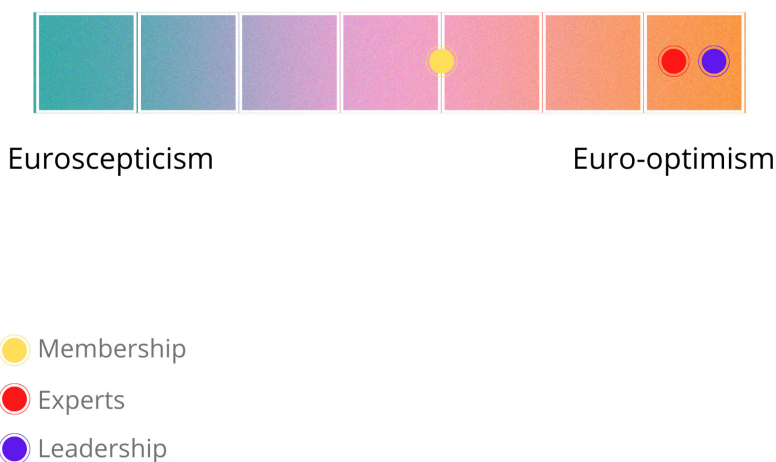


Source: the author's analysis

The leadership of DLBD considers the European integration of Serbia necessary, but the current government in Serbia, led by the SNS, does not have the true political will to turn the state to the West and the EU. They see the support given by the EU to the authorities in Serbia as a product of weakness and unclear attitude of opposition movements and parties. The Serbian authorities, through cooperation with Russia and China, are trying to substitute slow reforms and a stalemate in European integration. In DLBD, they point out that such foreign policy movements are a big failure. They think that the cooperation of the top states with Serbia is a joint project whose goal, among other things, is to stifle the opposition and the free media.

The membership of the DLBD believes that Serbia's European integration is a very slow process, and that the perspective of the European path has been called into question. Opinions on the EU are realistic. Attitudes are emphasized that Serbia should strive for the EU, but that it is not of crucial importance. They find reasons in the internal crisis of the EU, but also in the support it provides to the regime in Serbia. They do not have clear enough views on international actors and great powers, but individuals emphasize their affinities towards the Russian Federation and Vladimir Putin. Attitudes on these issues are not based on information about political relations, but feelings and emotions towards Eastern peoples.

Graph 6: EU axis (Euroscepticism / Euro-optimism) – Don't Let Belgrade D(rown)



Source: the author's analysis

CONCLUSION

Both the Movement of Free Citizens and Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own, as new political actors, have faced the challenge of ideological positioning and value identification with their target electorate. The challenges of the MFC were a consequence of the specific genesis of the movement, primarily as a leadership one, unlike DLBD, which emerged as an expression of rebellion and protest that reflected a certain active ideological position, quickly recognized by potential supporters of the movement. In this sense, the genesis of both movements significantly represents the “path-dependence” of their ideological and value identifications.

In the case of the MFC, we see that members of the movement are more in favor of socialist ideas in the economy, while leadership is more in favor of the market economy. It is also evident that the party's leadership is more pro-democratic than membership, and that it is more in favor of the idea of EU integration of Serbia. However, both leadership and membership share the same ideological principles when it comes to cosmopolitanism and civic values. In the case of the DLBD, we see that the leadership of the movement and the membership are quite synchronized when it comes to socialist economic ideas, while the leadership of the DLBD is significantly more democratic than the membership. Also, the leadership of the movement holds more cosmopolitan and civic worldviews, and they are significantly more euro-optimistic when it comes to the relationship between Serbia and the EU than membership.

This all tells us that these movements are facing an important path of ideological profiling, especially taking into account the new circumstances. With the departure of Sergej Trifunović from the position of president, the MFC lost its leadership character, and after the coalitional “drowning” of the MFC into the United Opposition for the elections in April 2022, the movement additionally lost its political identity. On the other hand, DLBD managed to “get out” of the local framework of Belgrade politics, in which it was much easier to profile oneself and find ideologically like-minded people. Becoming a parliamentary force after the elections in April 2022, the DLBD faces many challenges that are identity-ideological, which primarily relate to the need for a name change and adjustments in the way of communication that is no longer local-urban, but national-general.

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Original research paper

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PARLIAMENTARY AND ELECTION BOYCOTTS IN HYBRID REGIMES: EVIDENCE FROM SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

Abstract

Why do some opposition parties in hybrid regimes escalate their strategies of contention from parliamentary to election boycotts, while others do not? Opposition parties in hybrid regimes engage with a repertoire of extra-institutional strategies, including protests, parliamentary, and election boycotts. These strategies challenge the authoritarian dimension of the regime and aim to level the electoral playing field, but the election boycotts strategy carries more risk than the others, as it can marginalize the opposition. I argue that the opposition parties in hybrid regimes are less likely to take part in elections when the expected incumbent's electoral advantage is high, and when lower-risk extra-institutional strategies such as protests, and parliamentary boycotts are exhausted or not viable. The article presents evidence from Serbia, including data collected through interviews with the members of parliament and opinion polls, tracing the process that led the opposition parties to escalate the 2019 parliamentary boycott towards the 2020

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boycott of the elections, despite being aware of the likely adverse effects. I also conduct a comparative analysis of opposition parties in similar contexts of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania that boycotted the parliament but always took part in the elections. The article brings together the detached literature on parliamentary and electoral boycotts and contributes to a better understanding of opposition strategies in hybrid regimes.

Keywords: political parties, opposition, election boycott, parliamentary boycott, hybrid regime, Serbia, Balkans

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of mass anti-government protests in Serbia in late 2018, most opposition parties left the National Assembly. The parliamentary boycott that began in February 2019 escalated into the boycott of the 2020 general elections. The outcome was that the main opposition parties became extra-parliamentary, and the ruling majority comprised an astonishing 97% of MPs. Early elections were called for April 2022, and by the end of 2021, as a wave of new environmental protests was spreading across Serbia, the opposition parties decided to run in the elections again. While the parliamentary boycott was temporary and could have been reversed, the consequences of the elections boycott were more durable and momentous, resulting in the opposition's almost four-year absence from the parliament.

The environment for opposition parties in Serbia shares many similarities with other countries in the region, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, but their opposition parties did not go down the same path. The opposition in these three countries followed similar extra-institutional trajectories: the parties boycotted local elections, organized or supported mass, sometimes violent protests against the government, and boycotted the parliaments. Yet, the opposition never boycotted the general elections, instead, it used the leverage of extra-institutional strategies to call for early elections. Why did the opposition parties in Serbia escalate their strategy from parliamentary to election boycott, while the opposition in comparable circumstances in North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania did not?

Motivated by this empirical puzzle, this article's main goal is to explain the logic of opposition parties' escalation to high-risk contention strategies in hybrid regimes. It contributes to the literature on opposition parties' behavior in hybrid regimes by bringing together explanations of

parliamentary and election boycotts. It argues that the opposition parties' choice of election boycott, as a high-risk strategy, depends on the actors' understanding of the potential risks and gains, but they always relate it to their assessment and viability of other competing strategies: electoral participation and lower risk contention strategies.

Opposition parties in hybrid regimes operate in an environment in which they contest the rules of the game and have to play by them (Schedler 2006). To do so, the opposition chooses between a narrow scope of strategies that aim to delegitimize the ruling party, mobilize electoral support, or both. Taking part in the defective democratic institutions legitimizes them, and by choosing extra-institutional strategies, parliamentary boycotts, anti-government protests, or election boycotts, the opposition parties delegitimize the undemocratic dimension of the hybrid regime. However, these strategies carry different costs for the opposition (Kelley 2011). While the protests can galvanize opposition supporters, electoral boycotts are risky, as they can marginalize the opposition parties and hurt their electoral prospects. Even though the opposition parties may be aware of the higher risks, they opt for these strategies when other low-risk ones are exhausted or unfeasible.

The empirical part of this article examines a series of parliamentary boycotts in Southeastern Europe in the last decade. It focuses on an in-depth case study of the 2019-2020 transition from the parliamentary to the election boycott in Serbia, followed by a comparative analysis of three other cases from Southeastern Europe. It first explains the context of the hybrid regimes in which the opposition parties chose between different strategies, followed by a close evaluation of the possible risks and gains of the boycott in the case of Serbia, and an analysis of the sequences of events that led to the opposition escalating from low risk parliamentary to high-risk election boycott. In the final part of the article, I contrast this sequence of decisions to comparable environments in North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, where opposition relied on lower-risk strategies, and where parliament boycotts were not followed by election boycotts. The article ends with the discussion of wider ramifications for the understanding of opposition strategies in hybrid regimes.

OPPOSITION STRATEGIES IN HYBRID REGIMES

The quality of democratic governance has been in decline globally, but unlike the collapses of democratic polities in the past, which were usually violent, the latest wave of autocratization is characterized by

a gradual decline (Diamond 2015; Bermeo 2016). The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been hit hard by the latest wave of autocratization. Following the Great Recession, Poland, Hungary, Turkey, and Serbia were among the five countries that experienced the sharpest decline in V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (Lührmann & Lindberg 2019; Alizada et al. 2021).

These autocratizing countries have moved from liberal or electoral democracies to electoral autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018). Different authors pointed out, more than two decades ago, that regimes with characteristics of both democracies and autocracies are not transitional but stable forms (Levitsky and Way 2002; Carothers 2002). Many authors expected that countries would transition to consolidated democracies or return to being autocracies, but instead, competitive autocracies, the most common type of hybrid regimes, essentially autocratic but maintaining democratic form, have proliferated since the early 2000s (Schedler 2006; Levitsky & Way 2002; 2010; 2020).

The autocrats in modern hybrid regimes rely on democratic mechanisms to gradually disassemble democracies (Lührmann & Lindberg 2019). Leaders come to power in democratic elections, and then concentrate power and modify the institutional setting to secure the upcoming elections (Scheppelle 2018). Democratic institutions become a facade, concealing entrenched power in the formal institutions, ensuring that while elections are held, the transfer of power becomes unlikely (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018).

Hybrid regimes present a specific type of environment for the opposition parties (Hauser 2019; Helms 2021; Laštro & Bieber 2021). The opposition always has to play at two levels, it challenges the rules of the game that tilt the playing field in the incumbents' favor, and still has to participate in that game (Schedler 2006; Williamson 2021). Most of the time opposition competes in elections and condemns the government for democratic shortcomings at the same time, but sometimes the opposition parties retreat from participation and switch to extra-institutional means of contestation.

Opposition in hybrid regimes chooses among a limited repertoire of extra-institutional strategies (Schedler 2002; Hauser 2019). One of the most common strategies is mass protests, which signal to the government and voters the dissatisfaction with the regime or its policies (Beaulieu 2014; Brancati 2016). The level of contention of the protests can increase, from peaceful and legal demonstrations to acts of civil disobedience, such as blockades (peaceful but illegal), to violent demonstrations (neither peaceful nor legal). Yet, mass protests are a result of the collective action

of large numbers of people who are often a part of social movements, and not always organized by the opposition parties.

Parties can also choose whether to take part in the democratic process or not. Different forms of electoral boycott exist, but here it will refer to what Beaulieu (2006) considers a major election boycott, one which involves a majority of the opposition at the national level. Different aspects of electoral boycotts, from causes to consequences have been studied extensively (Beaulieu 2006; Kelley 2011; Smith 2014; Buttorff & Dion 2017). This is not the case with parliamentary boycotts, prolonged absences of elected representatives from the parliament, as a sign of protest, which are less often studied (Spary 2013). Burke (2019) is a rare example that analyzes both parliamentary and electoral boycotts, though in the context of new democracies, not hybrid regimes. Therefore, less is known about why some opposition parties in hybrid regimes escalate their strategies from parliamentary to opposition boycotts while others do not. This article explores the variation in outcomes across several cases in Southeastern Europe, where parliamentary boycotts occur often, but electoral less so.

HYPOTHESIS AND METHOD

The opposition parties in hybrid regimes compete in an environment in which they choose between different institutional (representation in parliament, competing in elections) and extra-institutional strategies (boycotts of parliament and elections, protests). Building upon the existing literature, we can first expect there is a hierarchy between them, with participation in elections coming at the top for the opposition parties. Opposition parties' primary path to power is through winning elections. When participation is not effective, and when the incumbent has an unfair electoral advantage, opposition parties weigh the instrumental value of the secondary, extra-institutional strategies, and choose the ones that carry the least risks and bring them closest to electoral success. Opposition can then switch between strategies, for example, from participation to boycott, or combine them, for example, relying on different forms of protests together with parliamentary boycotts. Finally, there is also a logic of escalation, changing a strategy with a more contentious one, to increase pressure on the government and change the rules of the game.

Opposition parties favor participation in elections when there is some chance of transfer of power. Yet, as the playing field in hybrid regimes is tilted to the incumbents' advantage, the opposition lacks equal access to resources and communication, necessary to mobilize electoral

support. When the ruling parties' advantage is greater, the opposition is more likely to combine the electoral participation with low-risk extra-institutional strategies such as protests or parliamentary boycotts, aimed to upset the existing balance, mobilize support, and increase their chances. Thus, opposition parties will participate when the incumbent's electoral advantage is low and will continue even when the advantage is higher, as long as they can pursue low-risk contention strategies. When this is not the case, for instance, when the opposition cannot mobilize their supporters, or when following the logic of escalation, these strategies are already exhausted, they will be more prone to boycott the elections.

Based on these empirical expectations, the hypothesis relates electoral participation as a dependent variable, and the incumbent's electoral advantage and the availability of two main extra-institutional strategies as independent variables, and can be stated as follows: *Opposition parties in hybrid regimes are less likely to take part in general elections when the expected incumbent's electoral advantage is high, and when lower-risk extra-institutional strategies of contention, such as parliamentary boycotts and protests, are exhausted or not viable.*

The scope conditions for this hypothesis are contemporary competitive autocracies, which developed during the last wave of autocratization. It refers to the contentious strategies of relevant national-level parties, which excludes marginal parties, and national minority parties. As described earlier, parliamentary boycotts are prolonged absences of major opposition parties' representatives from the national parliaments, which excludes temporary events such as walkouts, as well as prolonged boycotts of upper houses in bicameral parliaments, or from federal parliaments, unless this is the only directly elected representative body. Finally, the hypothesis explains participation in elections for the legislature, excluding second-order elections, such as local or regional, or federal, unless these are the only direct national-level elections, supranational elections, such as the election of Members of the European Parliament, presidential elections, as well as referendums.

The hypothesis is tested in the empirical part of this article, which consists of two parts, the case study of the 2019-2020 parliamentary and election boycotts in Serbia, and the comparative analysis of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. A case study method is first used to explain the electoral boycott in Serbia, which failed to happen in similar circumstances before or after, as well as in neighboring countries. It is first argued why the parliamentary boycott was a low and election boycott a high-risk strategy for the opposition. This is followed by tracing the process through which the opposition parties assessed their position

while paying attention to specific causal patterns that can explain their behavior (Gerring 2004; George & Bennett 2005).

In the second part, I present a comparative analysis of three countries, following broadly a method of difference (Ragin 2014). The analysis covers the main opposition actors in North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, from the outset of the Global Recession to the present. Comparing similar cases of autocratizing countries, controls most differences, and helps isolate, to an extent it is possible, the variation in incumbents' electoral advantage, protests, and parliamentary boycotts as the independent, and election participation as the dependent variable.

THE PARLIAMENTARY AND ELECTION BOYCOTT IN SERBIA

Boycotts in Serbia have not been a common phenomenon, however, their frequency followed a pattern. They were recurring more during the periods when Serbia was a hybrid regime (1990-2000, 2014-2022) than during the period of consolidation of democracy, from 2000 to 2014 (Ilić, Branković & Tepavac 2019). During the rule of the Socialist Party of Serbia, the first boycott of the parliament by a nationwide group of the opposition parties was in 1995, caused by the suspension of the parliament's live broadcasts. The largest election boycott occurred in 1997 when a newly formed opposition coalition objected to the deteriorating electoral conditions (Goati 2013). After the 2000 change of government, when the Democratic Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) were switching in power, both parliamentary and election boycotts became less frequent. A single opposition party briefly boycotted the parliament in 2005, and one opposition party boycotted the 2006 constitutional referendum. The next election boycott in Serbia happened only in 2020, after the 2012 change of government, when Serbia again developed features of a hybrid regime (Lührmann et al. 2018; Bieber 2018; Vladisavljević 2019; Levitsky & Way 2010; 2020; Alizada et al. 2021).

In line with the empirical expectations, the opposition parties in Serbia were more prone to use extra-institutional strategies, when the electoral advantage of the ruling authoritarian parties effectively made transfers of power through elections less viable. During the period when parties could challenge the ruling party in elections, the opposition fully relied on institutional strategies. Yet, this does not explain at what point exactly the opposition parties switch to different strategies, and for what reasons, which depends not only on the electoral advantage of the

incumbent but also on the viability of other low-risk strategies.

When the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) came to power in 2012, it started concentrating power in the executive branch and dominating the party system. Media pluralism was deteriorating, followed by the electoral conditions (Spasojević 2021). Following the 2016 election upset, when a large number of opposition parties managed to pass the electoral threshold, the conditions for the opposition parties in the parliament worsened. The government became an almost exclusive initiator of legislation, the majority expanded the use of urgent procedures, and the minority's oversight role was drastically reduced. The majority also began filibustering, joining discussions about several pieces of legislation, and introducing hundreds of amendments, to use the time for debate. This became a regular practice in 2017 and there was no debate about the 2018 budget at all (Tepavac 2021).

The first calls for a parliamentary boycott started after the presidential elections in April 2017, which the SNS leader Vučić won decisively in the first round. These were followed by a walkout, called the 'Boycott of warning' in May, while the boycott was still a divisive, unpopular strategy. However, it was increasingly discussed in the public from the winter of 2018, following the formation of an opposition coalition "Alliance for Serbia", the mass "1 in 5 million" protests, and the polarizing local elections in four municipalities, three of which the opposition boycotted.¹ The boycott of the parliament eventually began in January 2019, when 55 out of 88 opposition MPs stopped attending the sessions (Ilić, Branković & Tepavac 2019).

The parliamentary boycott began when the domination of the ruling party became overwhelming, after waves of mass protests in this period – the 2016 "Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own" and 2017 "Against Dictatorship", culminated with the 2018-2019 "1 in 5 million" protests. The opposition aimed to delegitimize the institutions that were increasingly out of their reach by boycotting local elections in 2018 and the parliament in 2019. However, while this addition of low-risk strategies is predictable, it does not explain the further escalation to a high-risk election boycott strategy.

As the protests subsided in early 2019, and there was no new mobilization, the election boycott started to be signaled as a possible way to increase the pressure on the government. Confronted with such a prospect, the ruling party deferred to some of the demands, and engaged in the first Interparty dialogue on electoral conditions in July 2019, initially organized by domestic civil society organizations. This

1 The opposition boycotted the elections in Kladovo, Kula and Doljevac, and ran in the Lučani municipality, held on November 11, 2018 (Crta 2019a).

was followed in autumn by the second round of dialogue, mediated by the representatives of the European Parliament. By the end of 2019, the government introduced several changes in the electoral laws, and formally improved some parliamentary procedures.

The opposition did not consider these concessions a sufficient improvement of electoral conditions that could balance the playing field. In addition, after months of weekly protests that culminated in the April of 2019, the opposition could not repeat such mass mobilization and lacked any other means to escalate the contention, other than following through with the election boycott. In the autumn of 2019, major opposition parties decided to boycott the elections, scheduled for April 2020 and postponed to June because of the Covid-19 state of emergency. Due to the pandemic and the boycott campaign, the 49% turnout was the lowest in the thirty years of multiparty elections, producing a parliament with almost no opposition (Bursać & Vučićević 2021).

The year before the regular 2020 elections is critical for understanding the escalation of strategy. By the spring of 2019, the opposition already used the whole extra-institutional repertoire – supporting mass protests, boycotting local elections, and the parliament. Participating in the Interparty dialogues did not affect the electoral balance, it had de-escalating effects, leaving the opposition with very few other options to increase the pressure on the government other than to call the election boycott. How exactly did the opposition parties make this choice of pursuing a high-risk strategy?

CHOOSING BETWEEN EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES IN SERBIA

The main motive of the opposition boycott in hybrid regimes is to remove the veil from the undemocratic aspects of the regime and press for its change. Yet as power is still secured through democratic elections, the opposition has to weigh how much would the abandoning of institutions hurt their electoral chances. When choosing between different extra-institutional strategies, opposition parties are confronted with this delegitimization-marginalization trade-off, which will be analyzed further.

The opposition in Serbia used the boycott to bring the quality of democratic institutions to the forefront of the political debate. By engaging in the Interparty dialogue, mediated by the EU, the government recognized that there was a crisis of democratic institutions, after years of ignoring the opposition's grievances. To some extent, the boycott also

damaged the legitimacy of the parliament and external support for the regime. The European Commission and Parliament's reports were more critical of the state of democracy in Serbia already in 2019, but the relations of European democracies with the government have not significantly worsened, and Serbia continued opening new chapters (clusters) in accession negotiation. Finally, the new parliament lacked pluralism, but it also improved procedures during 2019, continued legislating after the elections, and even successfully initiated constitutional changes in 2021 (European Commission 2019; 2020).

The parliamentary boycott was partially effective and did not cost the opposition parties much, but the marginalizing consequences of the election boycott were more substantial. After the election boycott, the opposition parties lost the seats in the parliament, and with them all institutional support. Without public funding, the asymmetry of resources with the incumbent became even more pronounced. Boycotts also caused divisions within and between parties. Out of 14 parliamentary actors that signed one of the two joint opposition declarations in 2018 and 2019, seven eventually backtracked and participated in either local or general elections, while all four largest parliamentary parties went through divisions or defections related to the boycott.² Finally, the boycott passivized the opposition supporters. The opposition never succeeded in building support for the boycott with their voter base, and as an unintended consequence of the boycott, opinion polls started showing decreased support for the opposition parties (Rujević 2020).

The parliamentary boycott has already dented the legitimacy of the rules of the game, with no high cost for the opposition, but by boycotting the elections, the opposition was taking a greater risk with almost certain costs and unpredictable gains. What mechanisms led to this choice?

The election boycott strategy started gaining traction during 2018, following the formalized cooperation between opposition parties, and protests that mobilized opposition supporters. The demands made at the protests that were not organized by the opposition, but were endorsed by it, were cited by the MPs as one of the key drivers for leaving the parliament.

2 “Joint conditions of the opposition for free and fair elections” signed on December 14, 2018, and the “Agreement with the People” from February 2019. The signatories, Democratic Party, Dveri, People's Party, Party of Freedom and Justice, Movement for Reversal, Fatherland, and Civic Platform boycotted the elections. Social Democratic Party and Together for Serbia participated in the 2020 local elections, Healthy Serbia, New Party, Party of Modern Serbia, Democratic Party of Serbia and Enough is Enough participated in all elections. Democratic Party, Dveri, People's Party, and Social Democratic Party experienced defections or splits.

An opposition MP said in an interview in March 2019 that:

“...the citizens demanded of us, members of parliament, to leave because this is no longer a legitimate parliament.”³

Others felt the heat coming from the streets. Another opposition MP said:

“We were told... our names would be booed if we participated in the session.”

However, the concurrently conducted polling showed that the support for the boycott was not as widespread as the MPs have thought. This dissonance can be explained through the ‘loudest voices’ fallacy: the MPs were responding to the most radical protesters’ demands, which did not necessarily reflect the sentiments among their wider base.⁴

Not all opposition MPs and parties shared this view either, and many had serious doubts about the boycott. However, they were conforming to the dominant view, which emerged following the newly established closer coordination between the opposition parties, and the perception that the opposition voters support the boycott strategy. One of the MPs said in the interview:

“We just couldn’t find a sufficient number of sufficiently determined MPs that would stand up against the boycott.”

In addition, even though the protesters started calling for the election boycott as early as February 2019, the primary aim of the MPs was not to escalate the parliamentary boycott. Only one of 42 interviewed MPs considered an election boycott as a possible next step. Instead, most MPs saw improved parliamentary practices and electoral conditions as the main goals of the parliamentary boycott.

However, by the summer of 2019, the circumstances have changed. The Interparty dialogue showed the ruling parties had no intention of substantially leveling the playing field. With elections in less than a year, the polls were not conducive either. Because of the calls for a boycott, many opposition supporters were not expressing voting preferences.

3 Opinions about the boycott were collected through short structured interviews in March 2019, from 42 opposition MPs from all parliamentary groups, including those that boycotted and those that did not.

4 In 2019, around 10% of respondents supported the boycott as a means of political struggle. Opinions about the boycott were collected twice, in March and September, on a sample of 1.115 (1.028) respondents, representative of the adult population of Serbia (Crta 2019b).

Most importantly, the protests had lost momentum in the spring, and the opposition could not mobilize the protesters to a degree comparable to late 2018. It was at this point, in September 2019, that the opposition decided to boycott the elections (Martinović 2019).

This section showed that, as the 2020 elections were getting closer, the repertoire of viable strategies for the opposition was narrowing towards the election boycott, as expected by the hypothesis. The electoral advantage of the incumbent was high and stable, the parliamentary boycott, local election boycott, and the protests, as lower-risk extra-institutional strategies, did not succeed in straightening the playing field, and could not be further escalated. The protest dynamic, which was not controlled by the opposition parties, was not conducive to the mobilization of electoral support. The 2018 winter protests had lost momentum and the opposition parties' attempts to mobilize supporters ahead of the 2020 elections were unsuccessful. If the opposition parties wanted to escalate the pressure on the government, the only still viable strategy was a high-risk election boycott.

If the analysis is extended to the only comparable election boycott in Serbia in 1997, the process that led to it was quite similar to the one that led to the 2020 boycott, which additionally supports the hypothesis. The political environment in the 1990s in Serbia can be best described as a form of hybrid regime, with the authoritarian Socialist Party (SPS) winning unfair, or, on some occasions, fraudulent elections. The 1993 parliament was the stage for the first major boycott by the national political parties. The SPS had formed a government with a slim majority, the opposition in the parliament was substantial and increasingly challenged the majority party. In July 1995 the majority voted to cease the live broadcast of parliamentary sessions, and the opposition parties had left the parliament in protest and did not return in a full capacity until the end of the mandate (Milošević 2000).

While the parliamentary boycott was ongoing, an attempt of electoral fraud at the 1996 local elections triggered a wave of protests during the winter of 1996-1997. After the external involvement of the OSCE representative, the SPS government eventually conceded, and the opposition parties won control of most major cities. The protests lost momentum in early 1997, and the opposition block dissolved in a power struggle. The opposition parties, that did not do well at the previous federal level elections, were now internally divided and confronted with even more unfair electoral conditions at the national level, and some of them decided to boycott the upcoming general elections in September. A group of parties, including the parliamentary Democratic Party, the

Democratic Party of Serbia, and the Civic Alliance boycotted the 1997 elections, which was the only instance of the relevant opposition parties boycotting the parliamentary elections in Serbia in the 1990s, while the Serbian Renewal Movement, Serbian Radical Party and the others ran in the elections. The 1997 elections were once again won by the Socialist Party of Serbia, which stayed in power until its downturn on October 5, 2000 (Goati 2013).

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, AND ALBANIA

So far, the hypothesis has been tested in the positive case of the boycotts in Serbia. To confirm its external validity, it should also be tested in other settings, and it should also be able to explain negative cases, instances in which the electoral boycott did not follow after the parliamentary boycott in similar circumstances, or in which ‘the dog didn’t bark’. This section of the article presents a comparative analysis of 2009-2021 North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, countries from the region that also experienced democratic decline and parliamentary boycotts in this period, but where the opposition did not escalate its strategy to election boycott.

There are important differences between these four countries; different historical backgrounds, sizes, levels of economic development, and diverging foreign and domestic politics. But they also share some features of the wider political environment in which opposition parties operate. They have similar issues with rule of law, power concentrated in the executive, marginalized parliaments and insufficient systems of checks and balances, politicized public administration, and mistrust in political institutions and political parties. Elections are characterized by pressures on voters, especially public employees, clientelistic practices, extensive patronage systems, and abuse of public resources. The countries also lack professional, objective public media, but have an abundance of biased media outlets and sensationalist print, often owned by entities related to ruling parties. Also, while all countries have experienced periods of democratic declines, the EU, with high linkage and leverage, was the main mediator in relations between government and the opposition (Way & Levitsky 2007). Controlling for many of these similarities allows for a comparison where the variation in the dependent variable, electoral participation, and the independent - incumbents’ electoral advantage, protests, and parliamentary boycotts, can be reasonably well isolated.

North Macedonia organized elections on average almost every two

years, three presidential elections were scheduled, and four parliamentary elections were held early. The party system consisted of two major parties, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO-DPMNE) was in power until 2016, after which the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) formed the government. In addition, the ruling coalitions have always included Albanian minority parties.⁵

From 2009 to 2020, the North Macedonian opposition participated in all general elections and almost constantly used extra-institutional strategies. The opposition frequently boycotted the parliament, occasionally boycotted the local elections, as well as the 2018 referendum, and staged or supported protracted protests that lasted for months. After the early decisive electoral victories of VMRO candidates, the opposition parties first began boycotting the parliament – half a year before the 2012 elections. Ahead of these elections, the advantage of the incumbent VMRO and their Albanian coalition partner DUI was large, but the opposition increased the pressure through extra-institutional means, hoping to dent their majority, especially after the public outcry because of the closure of critical media outlets. For the next two years, the opposition obstructed the parliament, which escalated on ‘Black Monday’ when opposition MPs and journalists were forcibly evicted from the building. Even though the VMRO’s advantage was considerable in this period, the opposition could escalate the pressure through organized protests and blockades, and it participated again in the 2014 general elections when the VMRO won the plurality of seats.

In 2014 North Macedonia entered a political crisis, starting with SDSM accusing the ruling party of election fraud, and boycotting the parliament. The crisis was exacerbated in 2015 after the release of wiretap recordings implicating officials in corruption and fraud. A record number of protracted mass protests followed across the country, and the SDSM took part in these, using them to mobilize electoral support. After the EU-mediated political agreement, PM Gruevski resigned in 2016, to allow a pre-electoral transitional government, which included opposition members. After these elections, the SDSM and Albanian minority parties formed the new government, the roles reversed, and now VMRO began prolonged protests, boycotting the parliament and the 2018 referendum. However, as opposition, VMRO participated in the 2019 and 2020 elections, which the SDSM managed to win with a slim margin, the former again only after the formation of the technical government.

5 See: Aleksov et al. 2019, European Commission reports 2010-2021, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final reports 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010-2018, 2020-2022.

Montenegro organized six general elections during the observed period; the 2009 and 2012 elections were early, and the two presidential and parliamentary elections were scheduled. Party life has been dominated by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) since the first multiparty elections in 1990. Unlike in North Macedonia and Albania, the main opposition parties were more fragmented, have been changing over time, and formed different coalitions. Even so, the DPS advantage has always been slim, and it needed coalition partners to form the government, up until 2020 when it lost elections for the first time.⁶

The opposition in Montenegro participated in all general elections. After 2015 it extensively relied on extra-institutional strategies, boycotting the parliament, and local elections, and organizing anti-government protests. In the wake of the convincing success of DPS in the 2009 general elections, the opposition initially boycotted the local elections and engaged in protests. However, ahead of the 2012 general elections, the ruling party's advantage was not as great, and DPS head Đukanović resigned as Prime Minister. The opposition was incentivized to return fully to institutional competition, using parliamentary inquiries and participating in the elections, which eventually gave DPS plurality but not the majority of seats. The opposition carried on challenging the ruling party at the presidential elections which the DPS candidate won by a narrow margin.

The small electoral advantage of the ruling coalition was not a sufficient incentive to maintain the opposition on the institutional track. In 2015, the opposition escalated protests against corruption and against Montenegro joining NATO. The scale of protests, and excessive use of force by the authorities, pushed the country into a political crisis. After the EU mediation, some opposition parties entered the power-sharing arrangement ahead of the 2016 elections, in which the DPS again won with a plurality of seats. The arrest of a group for alleged planning to disrupt the 2016 elections, which implicated the largest opposition party Democratic Front (DF) leaders, caused new turmoil, the opposition left the parliament and did not return fully until 2020. During this period, opposition escalated the pressure through a boycott of local elections, and following new corruption allegations, and the discontent with the new Law on Religious Freedoms that the Serbian Orthodox Church opposed, it managed to mobilize continuous mass protests, which culminated in the 2020 elections the opposition eventually won.

⁶ See: Kovačević 2019, European Commission reports 2010-2021, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final reports 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2020, Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010-2018, 2020-2022.

Albania, unlike the previously analyzed cases, elects the president indirectly by the parliament, and it held ‘only’ three scheduled parliamentary elections. The party system consisted of two main parties, the Democratic Party (DP), in power until 2013, and the Socialist Party (PS) which formed the government since then. Throughout the period, the opposition parties have participated in all general elections and boycotted the parliament and local elections in several instances, as well as organized mass protests.⁷

During the time it was the opposition, the Socialist Party boycotted the parliament from 2009 to 2012, as well as some local elections, accusing the government of the 2009 election fraud. In the lead-up to the 2013 elections, through a process mediated by the EU, it returned to the parliament, however, it lost the local election in Tirana by only 93 votes difference, and on the wave of anti-corruption protests, some of which turned violent, successfully increased the pressure on the government. In these circumstances, the PS did not have incentives to boycott the general election of 2013, which they won by a wide margin.

The Democratic Party began its opposition phase with the 2014 boycott of the parliament, which they repeated, for a couple of months, just before the 2017 general election. The DP participated in the local elections, in which the PS showed it had a stable, significant advantage. However, the parliamentary boycott, coupled with mass street protests, triggered a crisis, which, again through EU mediation, led to the technical power-sharing agreement ahead of the election, which incentivized the DP to run in the election. After another electoral loss in 2017, the DP intensified the extra-institutional pressure, by permanently resigning from the parliament, boycotting the 2019 local elections, and increasingly contentious demonstrations, which resulted in casualties, ahead of the 2021 elections. Even though there was no power-sharing agreement as in 2017, the DP 2021 electoral participation was driven by the escalation of extra-institutional strategies in the pre-election period.

The comparison of these three countries demonstrates different ways in which the opposition responded to democratic decline, by combining institutional and extra-institutional strategies, but as opposed to the Serbian case, stopping short of an electoral boycott. When the advantage of the ruling parties was smaller, the opposition participated in the elections. When the advantages were larger, the opposition escalated the pressure on the government through strategies that were

7 See: Krasniqi 2019, European Commission reports 2010-2021, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final reports 2009, 2013, 2017, 2019, 2021, Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010-2018, 2020-2022.

meant to enhance electoral mobilization. The comparative analysis also showed that the responses of the government to the opposition demands mattered. Temporary power-sharing agreements have been offered by the incumbents as a way to end political deadlock in all three cases, usually through external mediation. These should however be seen as mostly confirming the hypothesis, as power-sharing agreements can significantly reduce incumbents' electoral advantage, and therefore incentivize the opposition to participate in elections.

CONCLUSION

Parliamentary boycotts are becoming a more frequent form of contention as the number of hybrid regimes increases. In circumstances of pronounced power asymmetry, opposition parties aim to challenge the authoritarian dimension of the regime and level the electoral playing field. Parliamentary boycotts can send a powerful protest message, they don't require mass mobilization, 'just' the discipline of party members, and they are temporary and reversible.

On the other hand, the literature on election boycotts in hybrid regimes paints a bleak picture regarding its short-term effects on democratization but acknowledges some effects may emerge in the long term. While the effects of the election boycott are an important element of the existing literature, there was no sufficient explanation about the reasons opposition parties in hybrid regimes chose this high-risk extra-institutional strategy, and especially not how it interacts with competing or complementary strategies, such as parliamentary boycott.

The article was driven by the empirical puzzle of Serbian opposition escalating the boycott from parliament towards elections, while the North Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Albanian oppositions never abandoned electoral participation. The comparative analysis of these four cases showed that these different outcomes can indeed be associated with specific configurations of strategies of contention available to the opposition parties.

Evidence collected from Serbian opposition MPs that started the parliamentary boycott in 2019 showed that the extra-institutional turn was directly tied to the mass anti-government protests. But, due to the dynamic of the protests that were not controlled by the opposition parties, it could not have had instrumental value for electoral mobilization, as was the case in the three countries in the comparative analysis. The leaders of the mass protests in Serbia, just as in Montenegro, called the opposition parties to boycott the elections, but the opposition in Montenegro, similarly to

the other two cases, did not have incentives to follow through with these demands. The options of the opposition in Serbia, on the other hand, were narrowed down. They faced high incumbents' advantage, exhausted parliamentary boycott, and faded protest mobilization, leaving only high-risk strategies such as election boycott. The situation changed only in late 2021 when intense environmental protests and civil disobedience improved the outlook for opposition electoral mobilization, and all major parties participated again in the 2022 elections.

The empirical evidence presented in the article gives sufficient support to the hypothesis that the opposition parties in hybrid regimes are less likely to participate in elections when the incumbent's electoral advantage is high, and when lower-risk extra-institutional strategies of contention are unavailable. These findings contribute to the literature on opposition parties and elections in hybrid regimes, by emphasizing that electoral boycotts are a part of a wider extra-institutional repertoire of strategies available to the opposition. The logic of opposition parties' escalation to high-risk contention strategies in hybrid regimes is always conditional on this wider context.

The increased propensity of opposition parties to boycott the parliament can in given conditions drive parties towards the election boycott, as was demonstrated in this analysis, which can in turn deepen the crisis of democratic institutions. As hybrid regimes continue to proliferate globally, this makes the question of opposition strategies in dealing with the dilemma of participation or boycott even more urgent and politically relevant.

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Academic journal *Serbian Political Thought* welcomes articles reporting the latest results of both theoretical and empirical research in all fields of political science. Authors should refer mainly to the results of research published in academic journals, primarily in political science journals.

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Academic journal *Serbian Political Thought* adopts a modified version of Chicago citation style (17th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*), the author–date system of in-text parenthetical citation, with the list of references with full bibliographic information being placed at the end of the paper.

The bibliographic data in both the parenthetical citation and reference list should be cited in the original language of the source. The English translation of the reference title should be enclosed in square brackets after the original title. The references originally written in Cyrillic script should be transliterated into Latin script.

Below are the rules and examples of citing the bibliographic information in the reference list and in the text. For each type of source, a citation rule is given first, followed by an example of citation in the reference list and bibliographic parenthesis.

The bibliographic parenthesis, as a rule, is set off at the end of the sentence, before the punctuation mark. It contains the author’s surname, the year of publication and page numbers pointing to a specifically contextual page or range of pages, as in the following example: (Mearsheimer 2001, 15–17).

Books

Books with one author

Surname, Name. Year of publication. *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher.

Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

(Mearsheimer 2001)

Books with two or three authors

Surname, Name, and Name Surname. Year of publication. *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher.

Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

(Brady and Collier 2010)

Pollitt, Christopher, Johnston Birchall, and Keith Putman. 1998. *Decentralising Public Service Management*. London: Macmillan Press.

(Pollitt, Birchall and Putman 1998)

Books with four or more authors

Surname, Name, Name and Surname, Name and Surname, and Name and Surname. Year of publication. *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher.

Pollitt, Christopher, Colin Talbot, Janice Caulfield, and Amanda Smullen. 2005. *Agencies: How Governments do Things Through Semi-Autonomous Organizations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

(Pollitt et al. 2005)

Editor(s) or translator(s) in place of the author(s)

Surname, Name, Name and Surname, ed. Year of publication. *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher.

Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostigoy, eds. 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

(Kaltwasser et al. 2017)

Chapter in an edited book

Surname, Name. Year of publication. “Title of the chapter.” In *Title*, ed. Name Surname, pages range. Place of publication: Publisher.

Lošonc, Alpar. 2019. “Discursive dependence of politics with the confrontation between republicanism and neoliberalism.” In *Discourse and Politics*, eds. Dejana M. Vukasović and Petar Matić, 23-46. Belgrade: Institute for Political Studies.

(Lošonc 2019)

Journal Articles

Regular issue

Surname, Name. Year of publication. “Title of the article.” *Journal* Volume, if available (issue): page range. DOI.

Ellwood, David W. 2018. "Will Brexit Make or Break Great Britain?" *Serbian Political Thought* 18 (2): 5-14. doi: 10.22182/spt.18212018.1.

(Ellwood 2018)

Special issue

Surname, Name. Year of publication. "Title of the article." In "Title of the special issue", ed. Name Surname, Special issue, *Journal*: page range. DOI.

Chin, Warren. 2019. "Technology, war and the state: past, present and future." In "Re-visioning war and the state in the twenty-first century." Special issue, *International Affairs* 95 (4): 765–783. doi: 10.1093/ia/iiz106.

(Chin 2019)

Encyclopedias and dictionaries

When the author/editor is known

Surname, Name, Name Surname, ed. Year of publication. *Title*. Vol. Place of publication: Publisher.

Badie, Bertrand, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, and Leonardo Morlino, eds. 2011. *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*. Vol. 1. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

(Badie, Berg-Schlosser and Morlino 2011)

When the author/editor is unknown

Title. Year of publication. Place of publication: Publisher.

Webster's Dictionary of English Usage. 1989. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc.

(*Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* 1989)

PhD dissertation

Surname, Name. Year of publication. "Title of the dissertation." PhD diss. University.

Munger, Frank J. 1955. "Two-Party Politics in the State of Indiana." PhD diss. Harvard University.

(Munger 1955, 17–19)

Newspapers and magazines

Signed articles

Surname, Name. Year of publication. “Title of the article.” *Newspaper/Magazine* Date: page range.

Clark, Phil. 2018. “Rwanda’s Recovery: When Remembrance is Official Policy.” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2018: 35–41.

(Clark 2018)

Unsigned articles

Title of the newspaper/magazine. Year of publication. “Title of the article.” Date: page range.

New York Times. 2002. “In Texas, Ad Heats Up Race for Governor.” July 30, 2002.

(*New York Times* 2002)

Corporate author

Name of the corporate author [acronym if needed]. Year of publication. *Title of the publication*. Place of publication: Publisher.

International Organization for Standardization [ISO]. 2019. *Moving from ISO 9001:2008 to ISO 9001:2015*. Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.

(International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 2019) – *The first in-text citation*

(ISO 2019) – *Second and all subsequent citations*

Special cases of referencing

Citing edition other than the first

Surname, Name. Year of publication. *Title*, edition number. Place of publication: Publisher.

Bull, Hedley. 2012. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4th edition. New York: Columbia University Press.

(Bull 2012)

Multiple sources of the same author

- 1) *Multiple sources by the same author* should be arranged chronologically by year of publication in ascending order.

Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Mearsheimer, John J. 2010. "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (4): 381–396. doi: 10.1093/cjip/poq016.

- 2) *Multiple sources by the same author from the same year* should be alphabetized by title, with lowercase letters attached to the year. Those letters should be used in parenthetical citation as well.

Walt, Stephen M. 2018a. *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

(Walt 2018a)

Walt, Stephen M. 2018b. "Rising Powers and the Risk of War: A Realist View of Sino-American Relations." In *Will China's Rise be Peaceful: Security, Stability and Legitimacy*, ed. Asle Toje. 13–32. New York: Oxford University Press.

(Walt 2018b)

- 3) *Single-authored sources precede multiauthored sources beginning with the same surname* or written by the same person.

Pollitt, Christopher. 2001. "Clarifying convergence. Striking similarities and durable differences in public management reform." *Public Management Review* 3 (4): 471–492. doi: 10.1080/14616670110071847.

Pollit Christopher, Johnston Birchall, and Keith Putman. 1998. *Decentralising Public Service Management*. London: Macmillan Press.

- 4) *Multiauthored sources with the same name and surname* of the first author should continue to be alphabetized by the second author's surname.

Pollitt Christopher, Johnston Birchall, and Keith Putman. 1998. *Decentralising Public Service Management*. London: Macmillan Press.

Pollitt Christopher, Colin Talbot, Janice Caulfield, and Amanda Smullen. 2005. *Agencies: How Governments do Things Through Semi-Autonomous Organizations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Special cases of parenthetical citation

Exceptions to the rule of placing the parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence

- 1) If the *author is mentioned in the text*, even if used in a possessive form, the year must follow in parenthesis, and page numbers should be put in the brackets at the end of the sentence.

For the assessment, see Kaltwasser *et al.* (2017) ... (112).

According to Ellwood (2018) ... (7).

- 2) When *quoting directly*, if the name of the author precedes the quotation, the year and page numbers must follow in parenthesis.

Mearsheimer (2001, 28) claims that: "..."

- 3) When *using the same source multiple times in one paragraph*, the parenthetical citation should be placed either after the last reference (or at the end of the paragraph, preceding the final period) if the same page (or page range) is cited more than once, or at the first reference, while the subsequent citations should only include page numbers.

Do not use *ibid* or *op. cit.* with repeated citations.

Using brief phrases such as “see”, “compare” etc.

Those phrases should be enclosed within the parenthesis.

(see Ellwood 2018)

Using secondary source

When using a secondary source, the original source should be cited in parenthesis, followed by “quoted in” and the secondary source. The reference list should only include the secondary source.

“Its authority was greatly expanded by the constitutional revision of 1988, and the Court of Arbitration can now be regarded as a ‘genuine constitutional court’” (De Winter and Dumont 2009, 109 cited in: Lijphart 2012, 39–40).

Lijphart, Arend. 2012. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, 2nd edition. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Multiple sources within the same parentheses

1) When *multiple sources* are cited, they should be separated by semicolons.

(Mearsheimer 2001, 34; Ellwood 2018, 7)

2) When *multiple sources by the same author*, but published in different years are cited, the name of the author is cited only the first time. The different years are separated by commas or by semicolon where page numbers are cited.

(Mearsheimer 2001, 2010) or (Mearsheimer 2001, 15–17; 2010, 390)

3) When *different authors share the same surname*, include the first initial in the parenthesis.

(M. Chiti 2004, 40), (E. Chiti 2004, 223)

Chiti, Edoardo. 2004. “Administrative Proceedings Involving European Agencies.” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 68 (1): 219–236.

Chiti, Mario. 2004. “Forms of European Administrative Action.” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 68 (1): 37–57.

Legal and Public Documents

Sections, articles or paragraphs can be cited in the parentheses. They should be appropriately abbreviated.

Constitutions and laws

The title of the legislative act [acronym if needed], “Official Gazette of the state” and the number of the official gazette, or the webpage and the date of last access.

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 98/06.

(The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Art. 33)

The Law on Foreign Affairs [LFA], “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 116/2007, 126/2007, and 41/2009.

(LFA 2009, Art. 17)

Succession Act [SA], “Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia”, No. 48/03, 163/03, 35/05, 127/13, and 33/15 and 14/19.

(SA 2019, Art. 3)

An Act to make provision for and in connection with offences relating to offensive weapons [Offensive Weapons Act], 16th May 2019, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/17/pdfs/ukpga_20190017_en.pdf, last accessed 20 December 2019.

(Offensive Weapons Act 2019)

Government decisions and decisions of the institutions

The name of the government body or institution [acronym or abbreviation], the title and number of the decision, date of the decision passing, or the webpage and the date of the last access.

Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia [Protector of Citizens], Opinion No. 19–3635/11, 11 January 2012, https://www.ombudsman.org.rs/attachments/064_2104_Opinion%20HJC.pdf, last accessed 20 December 2019.

(Protector of Citizens, 19–3635/11)

U.S. Department of the Treasury [USDT], Treasury Directive No. 13–02, July 20, 1988, <https://www.treasury.gov/about/role-of-treasury/orders-directives/Pages/td13-02.aspx>, last accessed 20 December 2019.

(USDT, 13–02)

Legislative acts of the European Union

The title of the legislative act, the number of the official gazette, the publication date and the number of the page in the same format as on the *EUR-lex* website: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>.

Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission’s exercise of implementing powers, OJ L 55, 28.2.2011, p. 13–18.

(Regulation 182/2011, Art. 3)

Treaties

European Union founding treaties

Title of the treaty or title of the consolidated version of the treaty [acronym], information on the treaty retrieved from the official gazette in the same format as on the *EUR-lex* website: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>.

Treaty on European Union [TEU], OJ C 191, 29.7.1992, p. 1–112.

(TEU 1992, Art. J.1)

Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union [TEU], OJ C 115, 9.5.2008, p. 13–45.

(TEU 2008, Art. 11)

Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU], OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, p. 1–388.

(TFEU 2016, Art. 144)

Other treaties

Title of the treaty [acronym or abbreviation], date of conclusion, UNTS volume number and registration number on the *United Nations Treaty Collection* website: <https://treaties.un.org>.

Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization [Marrakesh Agreement], 15 April 1994, UNTS 1867, I-31874.

(Marrakesh Agreement 1994)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR], 19 December 1966, UNTS 999, I-14668.

(ICCPR 1966)

Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan [Israel Jordan Peace Treaty], 26 October 1994, UNTS 2042, I-35325.

(Israel Jordan Peace Treaty 1994)

Decisions of international organizations

The name of the international organization and its body [acronym], the decision number, the title of the decision, the date of the decision passing.

United Nations Security Council [UNSC], S/RES/1244 (1999), Resolution 1244 (1999) Adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999.

(UNSC, S/RES/1244)

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [PACE], Doc. 14326, Observation of the presidential election in Serbia (2 April 2017), 29 May 2017.

(PACE, Doc. 14326, para. 12)

Case law

Case law of the courts in the Republic of Serbia

The type of the act and the name of the court [acronym of the court], the case number with the date of the decision passing, the name and number of the official gazette where the decision is published – if available.

Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia [CCRS], IUa-2/2009 of 13 June 2012, “Official gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 68/2012.

(Decision of CCRS, IUa-2/2009)

Decision of the Appellate Court in Novi Sad [ACNS], Rzr–1/16 of 27 April 2016.

(Decision of ACNS, Rzr–1/16)

Case law of the International Court of Justice

The name of the court [acronym], *the case title*, type of the decision with the date of the decision passing, the name and number of I.C.J. Reports issue where the decision is published, page number.

International Court of Justice [ICJ], *Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995 (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia v. Greece)*, Judgment of 5 December 2011, I.C.J. Reports 2011, p. 644.

(ICJ Judgment 2011)

International Court of Justice [ICJ], *Accordance with the International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010, I.C.J. Reports, p. 403.

(ICJ Advisory Opinion 2010)

Case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union

The case title, the case number, type of the case with the date of the decision passing, ECLI.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Case C-270/12, Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 22 January 2014, ECLI:EU:C:2014:18.

(*United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union*, C-270/12) or (CJEU, C-270/12)

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Case C-270/12, Opinion of Advocate General Jääskinen delivered on 12 September 2013, ECLI:EU:C:2013:562.

(Opinion of AG Jääskinen, C-270/12)

Case law of the European Court of Human Rights

The case title, number of the application, type of the case with the date of the judgment passing, ECLI.

Pronina v. Ukraine, No. 63566/00, Judgment of the Court (Second Section) on Merits and Just Satisfaction of 18 July 2006, ECLI:CE:ECHR:2006:0718JUD006356600.

(*Pronina v. Ukraine* 63566/00, par. 20) or

(ECHR, 63566/00, par. 20)

Case law of other international courts and tribunals

The name of the court [acronym], the case number, *the case title*, type of the decision with the date passing.

International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 [ICTY], Case No. IT-94-1-A-AR77, *Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic*. Appeal Judgement on Allegations of Contempt Against Prior Counsel, Milan Vujin. Judgment of 27 February 2001.

(*Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic*, IT-94-1-A-AR77) or

(ICTY, IT-94-1-A-AR77)

Archive sources

Name of the repository [acronym], title or number of the fond [acronym], box number, folder number – if available, reference code, “title of the document” – or, if it is not available, provide a short description by answering the questions who? whom? what?, place and date – or n.d. if no date is provided.

Arhiv Srbije [AS], MID, K-T, f. 2, r93/1894, “Izveštaj Ministarstva inostranih dela o postavljjanju konzula”, Beograd, 19. april 1888.

(AS, MID, K-T, f. 2)

(AS, MID, f. 2) – *When the folder number is known only*

Dalhousie University Archives [DUA], Philip Girard fonds [PG], B-11, f. 3, MS-2-757.2006-024, “List of written judgements by Laskin,” n.d.

(DUA, PG, B-11, f. 3)

Web sources

Surname, Name or name of the corporate author [acronym]. Year of publication or n.d. – if the year of publication cannot be determined. “The name of the web page.” *The name of the web site*. Date of creation, modification or the last access to the web page, if the date cannot be determined from the source. URL.

Bilefsky, Dan, and Ian Austen. 2019. “Trudeau Re-election Reveals Intensified Divisions in Canada.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/world/canada/trudeau-re-elected.html>.

(Bilefsky and Austen 2019)

Institute for Political Studies [IPS]. n.d. “The 5th International Economic Forum on Reform, Transition and Growth.” *Institute for Political Studies*. Last accessed 7 December 7 2019. <http://www.ips.ac.rs/en/news/the-5th-international-economic-forum-on-reform-transition-and-growth/>.

(Institute for Political Studies [IPS], n.d.) – *First in-text citation*

(IPS, n.d.) – *Second and every subsequent citation*

Associated Press [AP]. 2019. “AP to present VoteCast results at AAPOR pooling conference.” May 14, 2019. <https://www.ap.org/press-releases/2019/ap-to-present-votecast-results-at-aapor-polling-conference>.

(AP 2019)

TEXT FORMATTING

General guidelines in writing the manuscript

The manuscript should be written in Word, in the following manner:

Paper size: A4;

Margins: Normal 2.54 cm;

Use roman font (plain letters) to write the text, unless specified otherwise;

Line spacing: 1.5;

Footnote line spacing: 1;

Title font size: 14 pt;

Subtitles font size: 12 pt;

Text font size: 12 pt;

Footnote font size: 10 pt;

Tables, charts and figures font size: 10 pt;

Use Paragraph/Special/First line at 1.27 cm;

Text alignment: Justify;

Font color: Automatic;

Page numbering: Arabian numerals in lower right corner;

Do not break the words manually by inserting hyphens;

Save the manuscript in the .doc format.

Research article manuscript preparation

The manuscript should be prepared in the following manner:

*Name and surname of the first author**

* In the footnote: E-mail address: The institutional e-mail address is strongly recommended.

Affiliation

Name and surname of the second author

Affiliation

TITLE OF THE PAPER **

** In the footnote: Optionally, include one of the following (or similar) information: 1) name and number of the project on which the paper was written; 2) the previous presentation of the paper on a scientific conference as an oral presentation under the same or similar name; or 3) the research presented in the paper was conducted while writing the PhD dissertation of the author.

Abstract

Abstract, within 100–250 words range, contains the subject, aim, theoretical and methodological approach, results and conclusions of the paper.

Keywords: Below the abstract, five to ten **key words** should be written. Key words should be written in roman font and separated by commas.

The paper can have maximum of three levels of subtitles. **Subtitles** should not be numbered. They should be used in the following manner:

FIRST LEVEL SUBTITLE

Second level subtitle

Third level subtitle

Tables, charts and figures should be inserted in the following manner:

- Above the table/chart/figure, center the name of Table, Chart or Figure, an Arabic numeral, and the title in roman

font;

- Below the table/chart/figure, the source should be cited in the following manner: 1) if the table/chart/figure is taken from another source, write down *Source*: and include the parenthetical citation information of the source; or 2) if the table/chart/figure is not taken from another source, write down *Source*: Processed by the author.

Use in-text references according to Citing and referencing.

Use the footnotes solely to provide remarks or broader explanations.

REFERENCES

References should be listed after the text of the paper, prior to the Resume in the following manner:

- the first line of each reference should be left intended, and the remaining lines should be placed as hanging by 1.27 cm using the option Paragraph/Special/Hanging;
- all the references should be listed together, without separating legal acts of archives;
- the references should not be numbered;
- list only the references used in the text.

After the reference list, write the name and surname of the author, the title of the paper and resume in Serbian in the following manner:

Име и презиме првог аутора*

* Фуснота: Имејл-адреса аутора: Препоручује се навођење институционалне имејл-адресе аутора.

Име и презиме другог аутора

НАСЛОВ

Резиме

Resume (Резиме) up to 1/10 length of the paper contains the results and conclusions of the paper which are presented in greater scope than in the abstract.

Keywords (Кључне речи): Key words should be written in roman font and separated by commas.

Authors who are not native Serbian speakers should contact the Editorial staff for assistance in translating the manuscript elements into Serbian.

Review preparation

A review should be prepared in the same manner as the research article, but leaving out abstract, keywords and resume.

Book review preparation

Book review should be prepared in the following manner:

Split the text into **two columns**.

*Name and surname of the author**

* In the footnote: E-mail address: The institutional e-mail address is strongly recommended.

Affiliation

TITLE OF THE BOOK REVIEW

Below the title **place the image of the front cover**;

Below the image of the front cover list the book details according to the following rule:

Name and surname of the author. Year of publication.

Title of the book. Place of publication: Publisher, total number of pages.

The text of the book review should be prepared following the guidelines of the research article preparation.

УПУТСТВО ЗА АУТОРЕ

У часопису *Српска политичка мисао* објављују се радови који представљају резултат најновијих теоријских и емпиријских научних истраживања у области политичких наука. Аутори би приликом писања радова требало да се позивају претежно на резултате научних истраживања који су објављени у научним часописима, првенствено у часописима политиколошке тематике.

Радови се објављују на српском језику и ћириличком писму или енглеском, руском и француском језику.

Часопис се објављује четири пута годишње. Прва три броја су на српском језику, а четврти на енглеском језику. Рокови за слање радова су: 1. фебруар, 1. мај и 1. август за издања на српском језику и 1. октобар за издање на енглеском језику.

Исти аутор не може да објави рад у два узастопна броја часописа, без обзира да ли је реч о самосталном или коауторском раду.

Аутори су у обавези да приликом слања радова доставе потписану и скенирану изјаву да рад није претходно објављен, односно да није реч о аутоплагијату или плагијату. Образац изјаве може се преузети са интернет странице часописа: http://www.ips.ac.rs/rs/magazines/srpska-politicka-misao/authors_directions/.

Радове за издања часописа на српском језику слати на имејл-адресу: spm@ips.ac.rs.

Радове за издање часописа на енглеском језику слати на имејл-адресу: spt@ips.ac.rs.

Научни чланак може имати највише 40.000 карактера са размацима, укључујући фусноте. Приликом бројања карактера изоставити списак референци. Изузетно, монографска студија може бити већег обима у складу са одредбама *Правилника о поступку, начину вредновања и квантитативном исказивању научноистраживачких резултата истраживања*.

Осврт може имати највише 15.000 карактера са размацима.

Приказ књиге може имати највише 10.000 карактера са размацима.

Приликом провере броја карактера користити опцију *Review/Word Count/Character (with spaces)* уз активiranу опцију *Include textboxes, footnotes and endnotes*.

НАЧИН ЦИТИРАЊА

Часопис *Српска политичка мисао* користи делимично модификовани Чикаго стил цитирања (17. издање приручника *Chicago Manual of Style*), што подразумева навођење библиографске парентезе (заграде) по систему аутор–датум у тексту, као и списак референци са пуним библиографским подацима након текста рада.

Податке у библиографској парентези и списку референци навести на језику и писму на коме је референца објављена.

У наставку се налазе правила и примери навођења библиографских података у списку референци и у тексту. За сваку врсту референце прво је дато правило навођења, а затим пример навођења у списку референци и библиографској парентези.

Библиографска парентеза се по правилу наводи на крају реченице, пре интерпункцијског знака, и садржи презиме аутора, годину објављивања и одговарајући број страна, према следећем примеру: (Суботић 2010, 15–17).

Монографија

Један аутор

Презиме, име. Година издања. *Наслов*. Место издања: издавач.

Суботић, Момчило. 2010. *Политичка мисао србистике*. Београд: Институт за политичке студије.

(Суботић 2010)

Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

(Mearsheimer 2001)

Два или три аутора

Презиме, име, и име презиме. Година издања. *Наслов*. Место издања: издавач.

Стојановић, Ђорђе, и Живојин Ђурић. 2012. *Анатомија савремене државе*. Београд: Институт за политичке студије.

(Стојановић и Ђурић 2012)

Pollitt Christopher, Johnston Birchall, and Keith Putman. 1998. *Decentralising Public Service Management*. London: Macmillan Press.

(Pollitt, Birchall, and Putman 1998)

Четири и више аутора

Презиме, име, име и презиме, име и презиме, и име презиме. Година издања. *Наслов*. Место издања: издавач.

Милисављевић, Бојан, Саша Варинац, Александра Литричин, Андријана Јовановић, и Бранимир Благојевић. 2017. *Коментар Закона о јавно-приватном партнерству и концесијама: према стању законодавства од 7. јануара 2017. године*. Београд: Службени гласник; Правни факултет.

(Милисављевић и др. 2017)

Уредник/приређивач/преводиоцац уместо аутора

Након навођења имена, ставити зарез, па након тога одговарајућу скраћеницу на језику и писму референце, нпр. „ур.“, „прев.“ „prir.“, „ed.“, „eds.“

Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostigoy, eds. 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

(Kaltwasser et al. 2017)

Поглавље у зборнику

Презиме, име. Година издања. „Наслов поглавља.” У *Наслов*, ур. име презиме, број страна на којима се налази поглавље. Место издања: издавач.

Степић, Миломир. 2015. „Позиција Србије пред почетак Великог рата са становишта Првог и Другог закона геополитике.” У *Србија и геополитичке прилике у Европи 1914. године*, ур. Миломир Степић и Љубодраг П. Ристић, 55–78. Лајковац: Градска библиотека; Београд: Институт за политичке студије.

(Степић 2015)

Lošonc, Alpar. 2019. “Discursive dependence of politics with the confrontation between republicanism and neoliberalism.” In *Discourse and Politics*, eds. Dejana M. Vukasović and Petar Matić, 23-46. Belgrade: Institute for Political Studies.

(Lošonc 2019)

Чланак у научном часопису

Чланак у редовном броју

Презиме, име. Година издања. „Наслов чланка.” *Наслов часописа* волумен (број): број страна на којима се налази чланак. DOI број.

Ђурић, Живојин, и Миша Стојадиновић. 2018. „Држава и неолиберални модели урушавања националних политичких институција.” *Српска политичка мисао* 62 (4): 41–57. doi: 10.22182/spm.6242018.2.

(Ђурић и Стојадиновић 2018, 46–48)

Ellwood, David W. 2018. “Will Brexit Make or Break Great Britain?” *Serbian Political Thought* 18 (2): 5–14. doi: 10.22182/spt.18212018.1.

(Ellwood 2018, 11)

Чланак у посебном броју

Презиме, име. Година издања. „Наслов чланка.” У „Наслов посебног броја”, ур. име презиме уредника, напомена о посебном издању, *Наслов часописа*: број страна на којима се налази чланак. DOI број.

Стојановић, Ђорђе. 2016. „Постмодернизам у друштвеним наукама: стање парадигме.” У „Постмодернизација српске науке: политика постмодерне / политика после постмодерне”, ур. Ђорђе Стојановић и Мишко Шуваковић, посебно издање, *Српска политичка мисао*: 5–35. doi: 10.22182/spm.specijal2016.1.

(Стојановић 2016, 27)

Енциклопедије и речници

Наведен је аутор/уредник

Презиме, име, име и презиме, ур. Година издања. *Наслов*. Том. Место издања: издавач.

Jerkov, Aleksandar, ur. 2010. *Velika opšta ilustrovana enciklopedija Larrouse: dopunjeno srpsko izdanje*. Tom V (S–Ž). Beograd:

Mono i Manjana.

(Jerkov 2010)

Није наведен аутор/уредник

Наслов. Година издања. Место издања: издавач.

Webster's Dictionary of English Usage. 1989. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc.

(*Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* 1989)

Докторска дисертација

Презиме, име. Година издања. „Наслов докторске дисертације.”
Докторска дисертација. Назив универзитета: назив факултета.

Бурсаћ, Дејан. 2019. „Утицај идеологије политичких партија на јавну потрошњу у бившим социјалистичким државама.”
Докторска дисертација. Универзитет у Београду: Факултет политичких наука.

(Бурсаћ 2019, 145–147)

Wallace, Desmond D. 2019. “The diffusion of representation.”
PhD diss. University of Iowa.

(Wallace 2019, 27, 81–83)

Чланак у дневним новинама или периодичним часописима

Наведен је аутор

Презиме, име. Година издања. „Наслов чланка.” *Назив новине или часописа* годиште: број стране на којој се налази чланак.

Авакумовић, Маријана. 2019. „Платни разреди – 2021. године.”
Политика, 8. децембар: 9.

(Авакумовић 2019)

Није наведен аутор

Назив новине или часописа. Година издања. „Наслов чланка.”
Годиште: број стране на којој се налази чланак.

New York Times. 2002. “In Texas, Ad Heats Up Race for Governor.” July 30, 2002.

(*New York Times* 2002)

Референца са корпоративним аутором

Назив аутора [акроним, по потреби]. Година издања. *Наслов издања*. Место издања: издавач.

Министарство за европске интеграције Републике Србије [МЕИРС]. 2018. *Водич за коришћење ЕУ фондова у Србији*. Београд: Министарство за европске интеграције Републике Србије.

(Министарство за европске интеграције Републике Србије [МЕИРС] 2018) – *прво навођење*

(МЕИРС 2018) – *свако следеће навођење*

International Organization for Standardization [ISO]. 2019. *Moving from ISO 9001:2008 to ISO 9001:2015*. Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.

(International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 2019) – *прво навођење*

(ISO 2019) – *свако следеће навођење*

Репринт издања

Презиме, име. [Година првог издања] Година репринт издања. *Наслов*. Место првог издања: издавач првог издања. Напомена „Репринт“ на језику и писму референце, место издања репринт издања: издавач. Напомена одакле су цитати у тексту преузети.

Михалцић, Стеван. [1937] 1992. *Барања: од најстаријих времена до данас*, треће издање. Нови Сад: Фототипско издање. Репринт, Београд: Библиотека града Београда. Цитати се односе на фототипско издање.

(Михалцић [1937] 1992)

Посебни случајеви навођења референци

Навођење другог и сваког следећег издања

Презиме, име. Година издања. *Наслов*, напомена о издању. Место издања: издавач.

Гађиновић, Радослав. 2018. *Млада Босна*, друго допуњено и измењено издање. Београд: Evro Book.

Више референци истог аутора

- 1) *Исти аутор, различите године* – Ређати према години издања, почевши од најраније.

Степић, Миломир. 2012. „Србија као регионална држава: реинтеграциони геополитички приступ.” *Национални интерес* 14 (2): 9–39. doi: 10.22182/ni.1422012.1.

Степић, Миломир. 2015. „Позиција Србије пред почетак Великог рата са становишта Првог и Другог закона геополитике.” У *Србија и геополитичке прилике у Европи 1914. године*, ур. Миломир Степић и Љубодраг П. Ристић, 55–78. Лајковац: Градска библиотека; Београд: Институт за политичке студије.

- 2) *Исти аутор, иста година* – Ређати према азбучном или абецедном редоследу почетног слова назива референце. Поред године објављивања ставити почетна слова азбуке или абецеде која се користе и у библиографској парентези.

Гађиновић, Радослав. 2018а. „Војна неутралност и будућност Србије.” *Политика националне безбедности* 14 (1): 23–38. doi: 10.22182/pnb.1412018.2.

Гађиновић, Радослав. 2018б. *Млада Босна*, друго допуњено и измењено издање. Београд: Euro Book.

(Гађиновић 2018а, 25), (Гађиновић 2018б)

- 3) *Исти аутор као самостални аутор и као коаутор* – Прво навести референце у којима је самостални аутор, а затим оне у којима је коаутор.

Стојановић, Ђорђе. 2016. „Постмодернизам у друштвеним наукама: стање парадигме.” У „Постмодернизација српске науке: политика постмодерне / политика после постмодерне”, ур. Ђорђе Стојановић и Мишко Шуваковић, посебно издање, *Српска политичка мисао*: 5–35. doi: 10.22182/spm.specijal2016.1.

Стојановић, Ђорђе, и Живојин Ђурић. 2012. *Анатомија савремене државе*. Београд: Институт за политичке студије.

- 4) *Исти аутор као први коаутор у више различитих референци* – Ређати према азбучном или абецедном редоследу презимена другог коаутора.

Pollitt Christopher, Johnston Birchall, and Keith Putman. 1998. *Decentralising Public Service Management*. London: Macmillan Press.

Pollitt Christopher, Colin Talbot, Janice Caulfield, and Amanda Smullen. 2005. *Agencies: How Governments do Things Through Semi-Autonomous Organizations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Посебни случајеви навођења библиографске парентезе

Изузеци од навођења библиографске парентезе на крају реченице

1) *Навођење презимена аутора у оквиру реченице* – Годину издања ставити у заграду након навођења презимена, а број стране на крају реченице у заграду. За референцу на латиници или страном језику у загради навести и презиме аутора.

„Према мишљењу Суботића (2010), ...” (30).

„Бокслер (Bochsler 2018) у својој књизи тврди...”

2) *Навођење презимена аутора у оквиру реченице пре цитата из референце* – Након навођења презимена, у библиографској парентези навести годину и број стране, а затим навести цитат.

Као што Суботић (2010, 45) наводи: „ ... ”

Миршајмер (Mearsheimer 2001, 57) изричито тврди: „ ... ”

3) *Навођење исте референце више пута у једном пасусу* – Ако се наводи иста страна или опсег страна, унети библиографску парентезу приликом последњег навођења или на крају пасуса пре интерпункцијског знака. Ако се наводе различите стране, референцу навести приликом првог позивања на одређену страну, а затим до краја пасуса у заграду стављати само различите бројеве страна.

Не користити „исто”, „*ibid*”, или „*op. cit.*” за вишеструко навођење референце.

Навођење израза „видети”, „упоредити” и сл.

Изразе унети у библиографску парентезу.

(видети Кнежевић 2014, 153)

(Степић 2015; упоредити Кнежевић 2014)

Секундарна референца

У библиографској парентези прво навести презиме аутора, годину и број стране примарне референце, затим „цитирано у:” и презиме аутора, годину и број стране секундарне референце. У списку референци навести само секундарну референцу.

„Том приликом неолиберализам се од стране највећег броја његових протагониста најчешће одређује као политика слободног тржишта која охрабрује приватне фирме и побољшава избор потрошачима, разарајући при том ’неспособну, бирократску и паразитску владу која никада не може урадити ништа добро, без обзира на њене добре намере’” (Chomsky 1999, 7 цитирано у: Ђурић и Стојадиновић 2018, 47).

Ђурић, Живојин, и Миша Стојадиновић. 2018. „Држава и неолиберални модели урушавања националних политичких институција.” *Српска политичка мисао* 62 (4): 41–57. doi:10.22182/spm.6242018.2.

Иста библиографска парентеза, више референци

1) *Различити аутори* – Референце одвојити тачком и зарезом.

(Степић 2015, 61; Кнежевић 2014, 158)

2) *Исти аутор, различите године* – Навести презиме аутора, а затим године издања различитих референци по редоследу од најраније до најновије и одвојити их зарезом, односно тачком и зарезом када се наводи број страна.

(Степић 2012, 2015) или (Степић 2012, 30; 2015, 69)

3) *Различити аутори, исто презиме* – Иницијал имена. Презиме аутора. Година издања.

(Д. Суботић 2010, 97), (М. Суботић 2010, 302)

Суботић, Драган. 2010. „Нови јавни менаџмент у политичком систему Србије.” *Политичка ревија* 23 (1): 91–114. doi: 10.22182/pr.2312010.5.

Суботић, Момчило. 2010. „Војводина у политичком систему Србије.” *Политичка ревија* 23 (1): 289–310. doi: 10.22182/pr.2312010.15.

Правни акти

У библиографској парентези навести члан, став и тачку или параграф коришћењем скраћеница „чл.”, „ст.”, „тач.”, „Art.” „para.” и сл.

Устави и закони

Назив акта [акроним, по потреби], „Назив службеног гласила” и број, или интернет адреса и датум последњег приступа.

Устав Републике Србије, „Службени гласник Републике Србије”, бр. 98/06.

(Устав Републике Србије 2006, чл. 33)

Закон о основама система образовања и васпитања [ЗОСОВ], „Службени гласник Републике Србије”, бр. 88/2017, 27/2018 – др. закон, 10/2019 и 27/2018 – др. закон.

(ЗОСОВ 2019, чл. 17, ст. 4)

Закон о наслеђивању [ZN], „Narodne novine“, br. 48/03, 163/03, 35/05, 127/13, i 33/15 i 14/19.

(ZN 2019, čl. 3)

An Act to make provision for and in connection with offences relating to offensive weapons [Offensive Weapons Act], 16th May 2019, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/17/pdfs/ukpga_20190017_en.pdf, последњи приступ 20. децембра 2019.

(Offensive Weapons Act 2019)

Одлуке државних органа и институција

Назив органа [акроним или скраћени назив], Назив акта и број предмета, датум доношења акта, или интернет адреса и датум последњег приступа.

Заштитник грађана Републике Србије [Заштитник грађана], Мишљење бр. 15–3314/12, 22. октобар 2012, https://www.osobesainvaliditetom.rs/attachments/083_misljenje%20ZG%20DZ.pdf, последњи приступ 20. децембра 2019.

(Заштитник грађана, 15–3314/12)

U.S. Department of the Treasury [USDT], Treasury Directive No. 13–02, July 20, 1988, <https://www.treasury.gov/about/role-of-treasury/orders-directives/Pages/td13-02.aspx>, last accessed 20 December 2019.

(USDT, 13–02)

Законодавни акти Европске уније

Назив акта, подаци из службеног гласила у формату наведеном на сајту *EUR-lex*: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>.

Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States

of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers, OJ L 55, 28.2.2011, p. 13–18.

(Regulation 182/2011, Art. 3)

Међународни уговори

Оснивачки уговори Европске уније

Назив уговора или консолидоване верзије [акроним], подаци о коришћеној верзији уговора из службеног гласила у формату наведеном на сајту *EUR-lex*: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>.

Treaty on European Union [TEU], OJ C 191, 29.7.1992, p. 1–112.

(TEU 1992, Art. J.1)

Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union [TEU], OJ C 115, 9.5.2008, p. 13–45.

(TEU 2008, Art. 11)

Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU], OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, p. 1–388.

(TFEU 2016, Art. 144)

Остали међународни уговори

Назив уговора [акроним или скраћени назив], датум закључивања, регистрација у Уједињеним нацијама – UNTS број, регистрациони број са сајта *United Nations Treaty Collection*: <https://treaties.un.org>.

Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization [Marrakesh Agreement], 15 April 1994, UNTS 1867, I-31874.

(Marrakesh Agreement 1994)

Convention on Cluster Munitions [CCM], 30 May 2008, UNTS 2688, I-47713.

(CCM 2008)

Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan [Israel Jordan Peace Treaty], 26 October 1994, UNTS 2042, I-35325.

(Israel Jordan Peace Treaty 1994)

Одлуке међународних организација

Назив међународне организације и надлежног органа [акроним], број одлуке, Назив одлуке, датум усвајања.

United Nations Security Council [UNSC], S/RES/1244 (1999), Resolution 1244 (1999) Adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999.

(UNSC, S/RES/1244)

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [PACE], Doc. 14326, Observation of the presidential election in Serbia (2 April 2017), 29 May 2017.

(PACE, Doc. 14326, para. 12)

Судска пракса

Судска пракса у Републици Србији

Врста акта и назив суда [акроним суда], број предмета са датумом доношења, назив и број службеног гласника или друге публикације у коме је пресуда објављена – ако је доступно.

Одлука Уставног суда Републике Србије [УСПС], IУа-2/2009 од 13. јуна 2012. године, „Службени гласник РС”, бр. 68/2012.

(Одлука УСПС, IУа-2/2009)

Решење Апелационог суда у Новом Саду [АСНС], Ржр–1/16 од 27. априла 2016. године.

(Решење АСНС, Ржр–1/16)

Судска пракса Међународног суда правде

Назив суда [акроним суда], *Назив случаја*, врста одлуке са датумом доношења, назив и број гласила у коме је пресуда објављена, број стране.

International Court of Justice [ICJ], *Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995 (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia v. Greece)*, Judgment of 5 December 2011, I.C.J. Reports 2011, p. 644.

(ICJ Judgment, 2011)

International Court of Justice [ICJ], *Accordance with the International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010, I.C.J. Reports, p. 403.

(ICJ Advisory Opinion, 2010)

Судска пракса Суда правде Европске уније

Назив случаја, број случаја, врста случаја са датумом доношења, Европска идентификациона ознака судске праксе (ECLI).

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Case C-270/12, Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 22 January 2014, ECLI:EU:C:2014:18.

(*United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union*, C-270/12) или (CJEU, C-270/12)

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v. European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Case C-270/12, Opinion of Advocate General Jääskinen delivered on 12 September 2013, ECLI:EU:C:2013:562.

(Opinion of AG Jääskinen, C-270/12)

Судска пракса Европског суда за људска права

Назив случаја, број представке, врста случаја са датумом доношења, Европска идентификациона ознака судске праксе (ECLI).

Pronina v. Ukraine, No. 63566/00, Judgment of the Court (Second Section) on Merits and Just Satisfaction of 18 July 2006, ECLI:CE:ECHR:2006:0718JUD006356600.

(*Pronina v. Ukraine*, 63566/00, par. 20) или (ECHR, 63566/00, par. 20)

Судска пракса других међународних судова и трибунала

Назив суда [акроним суда], *Назив случаја*, број случаја, врста случаја са датумом доношења.

International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 [ICTY], *Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic*, Case No. IT-94-1-A-AR77, Appeal Judgement on Allegations of Contempt Against Prior Counsel, Milan Vujin, Judgment of 27 February 2001.

(*Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic*, IT-94-1-A-AR77) или (ICTY, IT-94-1-A-AR77)

Архивски извори

Назив установе [акроним или скраћени назив], назив или број фонда [акроним или скраћени назив], кутија, фасцикла (уколико постоји), сигнатура, „Назив документа” (ако нема назива, дати краatak опис одговарањем на питања: ко? коме? шта?), место и датум документа или н.д. ако није наведен датум.

Архив Србије [АС], МИД, К-Т, ф. 2, r93/1894, „Извештај Министарства иностраних дела о постављању конзула”, Београд, 19. април 1888.

(АС, МИД, К-Т, ф. 2)

(АС, МИД, ф. 2) – ако је позната само фасцикла, а не и кутија

Dalhousie University Archives [DUA], Philip Girard fonds [PG], B-11, f. 3, MS-2-757.2006-024, “List of written judgements by Laskin,” n.d.

(DUA, PG, B-11, f. 3)

Извори са интернета

Презиме, име или назив корпоративног аутора [акроним]. Година објављивања или н.д. – ако не може да се утврди година објављивања. „Наслов секције или стране унутар сајта.” *Назив сајта*. Датум креирања, модификовања или последњег приступа страници, ако не може да се утврди на основу извора. Интернет адреса.

Bilefsky, Dan, and Ian Austen. 2019. “Trudeau Re-election Reveals Intensified Divisions in Canada.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/world/canada/trudeau-re-elected.html>.

(Bilefsky and Austen 2019)

Институт за политичке студије [ИПС]. н.д. „Предавање др Фридриха Ромига.” *Институт за политичке студије*. Последњи приступ 10. октобар 2018. <http://www.ips.ac.rs/rs/news/predavanje-dr-fridriha-romiga/>.

(Институт за политичке студије [ИПС], н.д.) – *прво навођење*

(ИПС, н.д.) – *свако следеће навођење*

Танјуг. 2019. „Европска свемирска агенција повећава фондове.” 28. новембар 2019. <http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view1.aspx?izb=522182>.

(Танјуг 2019)

ФОРМАТИРАЊЕ ТЕКСТА

Опште смернице о обради текста

Текст рада обрадити у програму *Word*, на следећи начин:

величина странице: А4;

маргине: *Normal* 2,54 cm;

текст писати курентом (обичним словима), осим ако није другачије предвиђено;

проред између редова у тексту: 1,5;

проред између редова у фуснотама: 1;

величина слова у наслову: 14 pt;

величина слова у поднасловима: 12 pt;

величина слова у тексту: 12 pt;

величина слова у фуснотама: 10 pt;

величина слова за табеле, графиконе и слике: 10 pt;

увлачење првог реда пасуса: 1,27 cm (опција: *Paragraph/Special/First line*);

поравнање текста: *Justify*;

боја текста: *Automatic*;

нумерација страна: арапски бројеви у доњем десном углу;

не преламати речи ручно уношењем цртица за наставак речи у наредном реду;

сачувати рад у формату .doc.

Примена правописних правила

Радове ускладити са *Правописом српског језика* у издању Матице

српске из 2010. године или из каснијих издања.

Посебну пажњу обратити на следеће:

Приликом првог навођења **транскрибованих страних имена и израза** у облој загради поред навести и њихове облике на изворном језику у курзиву (*italic*), нпр: Франкфуртер алгемајне цајтунг (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), Џон Ролс (*John Rawls*), Алексеј Тупољев (*Алексей Туполев*).

Поједине **општепознате стране изразе** писати само на изворном језику у курзиву, нпр. *de iure, de facto, a priori, a posteriori, sui generis* итд.

Реченицу не почињати акронимом, скраћеницом или бројем.

Текст у фуснотама увек завршавати тачком.

За навођење израза или **цитирања на српском језику** користити наводнике који су својствени српском језику према важећем правопису („ ”), а за навођење или **цитирање на енглеском или другом страном језику** користити наводнике који су својствени том језику (“ ”, « »).

Угластом заградом [] означавати: 1) сопствени текст који се умеће у туђи текст; или 2) текст који се умеће у текст који је већ омеђен облом заградом.

Црту писати са размаком пре и после или без размака, никако са размаком само пре или само после. Између бројева, укључујући бројеве страна, користити примакнуту црту (–), а не цртицу (-).

За **наглашавање појединих речи** не користити подебљана слова (**bold**), нити подвучена слова (underline) већ искључиво курзив (*italic*) или наводнике и полунаводнике (’ ’ на српском језику или ‘ ’ на енглеском језику).

Форматирање научног чланка

Научни чланак форматирати на следећи начин:

*Име и презиме првог аутора**

* Фуснота: Имејл-адреса аутора: Препоручује се навођење институционалне имејл-адресе аутора.

Установа запослења

Име и презиме другог аутора

Установа запослења

НАСЛОВ РАДА**

** Фуснота: по потреби, навести један од следећих (или сличних) података: 1) назив и број пројекта у оквиру кога је чланак написан; 2) да је рад претходно изложен на научном скупу у виду усменог саопштења под истим или сличним називом; или 3) да је истраживање које је представљено у раду спроведено за потребе израде докторске дисертације аутора.

Сажетак

Сажетак, обима од 100 до 250 речи, садржи предмет, циљ, коришћени теоријско-методолошки приступ, резултате и закључке рада.

Кључне речи: Испод текста сажетка навести од пет до десет **кључних речи**. Кључне речи писати курентом и једну од друге одвојити зарезом.

У тексту је могуће користити највише три нивоа подналова. **Поднаслов** навести без нумерације, на следећи начин:

ПОДНАСЛОВ ПРВОГ НИВОА

Поднаслов другог нивоа

Поднаслов трећег нивоа

Табеле, графиконе и слике уносити на следећи начин:

- изнад табеле/графикона/слике центрирано написати: Табела/Графикон/Слика, редни број и назив;
- испод табеле/графикона/слике навести извор на следећи

начин: 1) уколико су табела/графикон/слика преузети, написати *Извор*: и навести референцу на исти начин као што се наводи у библиографској парентези; 2) уколико нису преузети, написати *Извор*: Обрада аутора.

Референце наводити у тексту према Начину цитирања.

Фусноте користити искључиво за давање напомена или ширих објашњења.

РЕФЕРЕНЦЕ

Списак референци навести након текста рада, а пре резимеа, на следећи начин:

- прво навести референце на ћирилици по азбучном реду;
- затим навести референце на латиници и страним језицима по абecedном реду;
- прву линију сваке референце поравнати на левој маргини, а остале увући за 1,27 cm, користећи опцију *Paragraph/Special/Hanging*;
- све референце наводити заједно, без издвојених делова за правне акте или архивску грађу;
- референце не нумерисати;
- наводити искључиво оне референце које су коришћене у тексту.

Након списка референци навести име и презиме аутора, наслов рада и резиме на енглеском језику на следећи начин:

First Author*

* In the footnote: E-mail address: The institutional e-mail address is strongly recommended.

Affiliation

Second Author

Affiliation

TITLE

Resume

Резиме, обима до 1/10 дужине чланка, садржи резултате и

закључке рада који су образложени опширније него у сажетку.

Keywords: Кључне речи писати курентом и једну од друге одвојити зарезом.

Уколико је **рад написан на страном језику**, након списка референци, име и презиме аутора, наслов, резиме и кључне речи навести на српском језику.

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Осврт форматирати на исти начин као научни чланак, без навођења сажетка, кључних речи и резимеа.

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Испод наслова **поставити слику предње корице**;

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