

Beka CHEDIA

East European University (Tbilisi, Georgia); Jamestown Foundation
ORCID: 0009-0006-7658-3005

Impact of the Pandemic on Damaging the Democratic Process in a Hybrid Regime in Georgia

Abstract: In hybrid political system of Georgia, in condition of COVID-19, the population obeyed control and strict regulations. Concepts such as the Iron Curtain, curfew, etc., have returned to the country's political vocabulary. How can these symbols of a totalitarian (Soviet) past fit into the process of democratization? What is the reaction of society, other political actors? Why and how pandemic damaged democracy in Georgia? Does this threaten to revise the concept of a democratic political system, which will be especially difficult for post-totalitarian society?

This research paper examines case of Georgia: how political institutions, political elite, society, Media, the country's legislative base was ready for new reality and what political consequences this crisis would have in the process of democratization and nation-building. Unfair political competition during the elections, the growth of populism, the partial abandonment of certain rights, the deepening of polarization, etc. – are these challenges related only to the pandemic or have they also threatened Georgian democracy in “normal” times?

Key words: Georgia, hybrid regime, COVID-19, elections, crisis, populism, democratic standards

Introduction

The following paper aims to answer the following research question: What impact has the pandemic had on the Hybrid political regime of Georgia, has it become more democratic, more authoritarian, or retained its current status?

The pandemic in Georgia coincided with two very important elections, Parliamentary Elections 2020 and Local Self-Government Elections 2021, which were supposed to decide the fate of not only the existing political regime and power, but also the democratic future of the country. This research paper analyses Impact of the Pandemic on the status of democracy in the country with using examples of this two pandemic elections, as well as the entire political process. Special attention is paid to the analysis of populism and polarization in the context of a pandemic. In the paper, the author argues that a post-Soviet society, such as Georgia, which, after the collapse of the USSR, is making every effort to eradicate totalitarian practices and is in the process of democratization, may face a wider range of problems: the growth of populism, the partial abandonment of certain rights, the deepening of polarization, the devaluation of democratic values, etc. political elites may be tempted to stop the country's democratic development.

In the study author analyzes Georgia's restrictive policy measures to limit COVID-19 (state of emergency, curfew, quarantine or lockdown) and key developments during the Pandemic (2020–2021), including constitutional reform 2020, changes electoral rules, political crisis, etc. How these anti pandemic measures cor-

responded to democratic norms and whether political players used it to strengthen their position. For this as research tool is using a certain data matrix that classifies the behavior of political actors directly during the pandemic (2020–2021) and shows the connection between the pandemic and populism, manipulation, polarization as the opposite of democracy.

The research is based on the collection and analysis of empirical data on the behavior of the political elite, the government, parties and the opposition. Two types of data are compared: before the pandemic and during the pandemic, – to identify what changes have occurred (if any) in various parameters, such as the number of political subjects participating in the elections, and the difference in the number of voters before and after the pandemic, growth or shrinkage of the political scene and level of political participation.

Theoretical background

If even in developed democracies a pandemic contributed to a change in the usual political order and temporarily limited democratic norms and some of the rights of people, then in poorly developed democracies the situation is even more complicated. Freedom House identifies Georgia as Transitional or Hybrid regime (Freedom House, 2021). As some studies show – the higher the democratic quality the lower the restriction of individual freedoms and the concentration of power on the national executive (Engler et al., 2021, p. 1082). The experts of the V-Dem Institute found that in those European countries where democratic institutions were strong before the pandemic, anti-pandemic measures could not damage democratic standards, but in those countries where democracy was weak even before the pandemic, the pandemic had a negative impact (Lührmann et al., 2020). More recent (2021) analyses of same scholars show that in weak democracies and hybrid regimes, violations of democratic standards could be harbingers of autocratization, as leaders take advantage of the pandemic's exceptional context to consolidate power, sideline opposition, and silence critics (Edgell et al., 2021, p. 9) Study of International idea also shows the pandemic has thus had a particularly damaging effect on non-democratic countries (hybrid and authoritarian regimes) and their civic space (International Idea, 2021a, p. 1).

The international idea (2020–2021) has collected valuable data during the pandemic in which countries elections were held, and what were voter turnout trends amid COVID-19, and which countries postponed elections. Such data makes it possible to analyze how democratic, authoritarian or hybrid countries acted in this case. Researchers from The University of Cambridge' Centre for the Future of Democracy (CFD), have conducted the global overview of how the COVID-19 crisis has affected political beliefs. They found that faith in the democratic process has continued to falter but in same time may have reduced the political polarisation and support for populism (Foa et al., 2022, p. 2). Although the case of Georgia do not exactly coincide with these findings – as argued below in section 3 of this paper.

Some scholars argue that democratic countries responded more slowly to the pandemic than autocratic regimes (Cheibub, Hong, Przeworski, 2020, p. 1). Georgia, which, compared to neighboring countries, took immediate action, deserved the praise of Free-

dom House and the international community. Other researchers argue that the slow response to the crisis in some countries was due to the presence in these countries of strong democratic institutions, so they could block non-democratic measures taken by the governments of these countries. Although, using the example of Georgia during the first wave of the pandemic, it was precisely the existing democratic institutions, such as the media and NGOs that, on the contrary, themselves incited the authorities to take quick restrictive measures. Some of the hypotheses or judgments that exist in the rapidly growing literature about the pandemic and its impact on democracy need to be carefully tested.

Some scholars identify two main types of measures against COVID-19 that are contrary to democratic principles: 1) Measures that restrict individual freedom (such as freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, the restrictions of international or domestic travelling, the ban of public gatherings or strict 'stay-at-home' policies, etc. 2) Power concentration, i.e. the transfer of legislative powers from parliament to the government (Engler et al., 2021, p. 1080).

Adaptation of Legislation to the Crisis Conditions

Georgia followed the example of many other countries – during the first wave of the pandemic declared (on March 21, 2020) a State of Emergency and very soon, quarantine and a curfew throughout the country. Georgia closed its land borders as well as suspended regular transnational air traffic. In Media commenting on the risks of the pandemic, the director general of the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center (under the Ministry of Health), slipped of the tongue and used a term associated with totalitarianism: “the borders are closed by an iron curtain.” In Georgia, during a state of emergency, may be restricted the following rights: Human liberty; Freedom of movement; Personal privacy; Freedom of the expression; Fair administrative proceedings, Access to public information, Property; Freedom of assembly; Labor (Constitution of Georgia, 1995). It is positive that the state of emergency did not affect basic political rights: the activities of political parties, the media and freedom of speech or NGOs were not restricted, all political, social and judicial institutions operated as usual (although remotely) under conditions of the state of emergency.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the presence in Georgia has a low legal culture and lack of equality before the law – typical for hybrid regimes. Under the unprecedented strict bans, one of the most important elements of democracy, the rule of law for all, has been violated. During the first wave of the pandemic in April 2020 when Georgians celebrated Orthodox Easter – The Georgian Orthodox Church refused to acquiesce to the emergency orders forbidding public congregations of more than three people and the curfew. The law and the authorities were powerless before the Church. During the second wave of the pandemic, in the local media was published a scandalous photo of Director General of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia. The top official, who led the management of the pandemic in the country, categorically forbade crowded gatherings, weddings, etc. to citizens, but himself was caught in the fact how, together with many people, he spent time at a feast.

Pandemic for weakly the developed democracy of Georgia has become a dilemma – how could the country hold two very important elections under conditions of a state of emergency? According to International Idea in the period from 21 February 2020 until 31 December 2021: at least 80 countries and territories across the globe postponed national and subnational elections, out of which at least 42 countries and territories have decided to postponed national elections and referendums (International Idea, 2021b). Georgia also considered the option of postponing the elections to a later time, and it is paradoxical that the opposition was more actively supporting the postponement of the elections than the authorities. Paradoxically, during the first wave of the pandemic, when isolated cases of the disease were recorded in Georgia, most of the opposition, the media and NGOs called on the authorities to declare a state of emergency. The paradox is that those social institutions that, as usual, play the role of watchdog, such as the media and NGOs, on the contrary, should have opposed the announcement of emergency measures, especially on the eve of parliamentary elections. According to the Constitution of Georgia, during a state of emergency or martial law, general elections cannot be held. Therefore, the Georgian authorities lifted the state of emergency on the eve of the elections and instead made several special amendments in a row (in 2020) to the law on public health which allows the authorities to impose certain restrictions without imposing a state of emergency. The new legislative instruments give the Georgian government the opportunity to use the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police to restrict such rights of citizens as, for example, the right to free movement, the right to assembly, property rights, labor rights etc. (Law of Georgia on Public Health, 2020). Immediately after the entry into force of these rules, a group consisting of lawyers filed a lawsuit in the country's constitutional court, pointing out that these legislative changes contradict both the country's constitution, international standards, and threaten the principles of democracy and the separation of powers. The Constitutional Court of Georgia for the most part did not satisfy the lawyers' claim, the court only recognized the restriction of labor rights as unconstitutional, and the possibility of all other restrictions have remained in force (Decision of the Constitutional Court of Georgia, 2021).

These legislative changes gave the authorities the opportunity to hold elections on time, although it became a dangerous precedent for legalizing the restriction of the fundamental rights of citizens without declaring a state of emergency. The authorities provided this legislative innovation to society as a temporary measure, as a kind of alternative to a state of emergency, in order to hold elections in the country without hindrance. These legislative changes came into force on May 2, 2020 and were extended several times. After the end of both elections, in December 2021, this controversial legislation was renewed again, which became a matter of concern in Georgia. If the opposition supported the declaration of a state of emergency, then the modification of the law on public health became unfavorable for them, since it can be used as a political instrument at any time against the activity of the opposition: Organization of rallies, demonstrations, etc. in the context of a prolonged political crisis that began after the end of the parliamentary elections. It should be noted that such restrictions have not been used in practice. After the parliamentary elections, several large opposition protests took place, but the authorities refrained from using restrictive measures.

During COVID crisis as in certain countries – in Georgia have also been changes of electoral rules, although these were not related to the pandemic. Actually, according to

the political tradition of Georgia, before every election are changed the electoral legislation and the constitution. The political elite, both the authorities and the opposition parties, before each election, try to initiate such changes in order to get the maximum benefit and the most convenient conditions for themselves during the elections. The pandemic coincided also with the next legislative and constitutional reform. The state of emergency did not last long, but restrictions associated with the circulation of infection in the country limited the procedure for public discussion about the constitutional reform. If all of previous constitutional reforms were carried out in conditions of at least formally in a democratic environment with providing public debate, but in a pandemic, the involvement of civil society in this process was limited. Previously, out of 150 members of the parliament included 77 members elected by party lists and 73 members in the single-seat majoritarian electoral districts. According to the constitutional reform of June 2020 – the number of deputies elected by party lists increased to 120, and the number of majoritarian deputies decreased to 30. As a part of reform the electoral threshold lowered from 5 to 1 percent (Constitutional Law, No. 6500-RS, 2020).

During the first wave all COVID regulations were strictly observed, and for violations were actively fined. Later, on the eve of the 2021 local self-government elections, the government announced an amnesty and removed liability from those individuals (up to 40,000 people) and companies (approx. 45 companies) who were fined for violating the rules of wearing a mask, isolation or quarantine. Practically, the authorities used this amnesty (i.e. the theme of the pandemic) for political purposes – to bribe voters.

Political Actors and Elections in Pandemic

Reform of electoral laws and constitutions dramatically changed the landscape of political parties ahead of elections. Before the pandemic, 250 political parties were registered in Georgia. As of February 2020 – until December 2021, another 25 new parties were registered in the country. Accordingly, during the pandemic, the number of political parties in Georgia reached 275 (National Agency of Public Registry of Ministry of Justice of Georgia, 2021).

Under the conditions the pandemic, far more political actors took part in parliamentary and Local Self-government elections than before the pandemic. The reduction in the electoral threshold has caused a dramatic growth in new parties participating in the elections. Noticeable the growth of candidates who were represented by electoral subjects: The number of party candidates has doubled, but during the pandemic the number of majoritarian candidates has sharply decreased.

For the Parliamentary Elections 2020 were registered 50 electoral subjects, including 48 parties and two electoral blocs. Of these 50 electoral subjects, half took part in the elections for the first time. For the Parliamentary Elections 2020 were registered 6882 candidates nominated by party lists and 490 majoritarian candidates (Election Administration of Georgia, 2021, p. 7). For comparison: For the previous Parliamentary Elections which held before pandemic in 2016 were registered only 35 electoral subjects (19 political parties and 6 election blocs) and 53 initiative groups. There were registered 3524 party-nominated candidates and 816 majoritarian candidates (Election

Administration of Georgia, 2016, p. 9–10). For the Local Self-government Elections which held during the pandemic in 2021 were registered 43 parties and 68 initiative groups (Election Administration of Georgia, 2021, p. 38). For comparison: For the previous Elections of the Local Self-government which held before pandemic in 2017 were registered only 28 electoral subjects (Election Administration of Georgia, 2017, p. 10) (see table 1).

Table 1

Election Dates	Before the Pandemic		During the Pandemic	
	2016	2017	2020	2021
Election Types	Parliamentary Elections	Local Self-government Elections	Parliamentary Elections	Local Self-government Elections
Electoral Subjects	35	28	50	43
Candidates Nominated by Party Lists	3,524	12,902	6,882	20,623
Majoritarian Candidates	816	4,974 (+Mayor Candidates 369)	490	2,771 (+Mayor Candidates 239)

According to International Idea during the pandemic voter turnout declines in 65 (65%) countries and increased in 35 (35%) countries (International Idea, 2021b). Georgia is one of those countries where the pandemic did nothing to prevent high voter turnout. In recent years, political apathy has been clearly visible among Georgian voters and society: disillusionment with the work of political parties and distrust of the electoral process. There was a real danger that the pandemic could become an additional reason for the low voter turnout. The 2020 parliamentary elections and the 2021 local-self government elections were so critical to Georgia's political system that voter turnout surpassed all negative expectations. After the 2012 parliamentary elections (when the Georgian Dream came to power) such high activity was recorded for the first time in 2020. During the 2020 parliamentary elections, out of the total number of registered voters (3,511,338) – 56.75% (1,992,891 citizens) took part in the elections (Election Administration of Georgia, 2021, p. 12). During the local government elections in 2021, out of 3,498,559 registered voters – 51.92% (1,815,776 voters) took part in the elections (Election Administration of Georgia, 2021, p. 72). Before the pandemic, Georgia held presidential elections in 2018, which were also of particular importance in terms of their significance: According to the constitutional reform of 2017, the country finally turned into a parliamentary republic, and Georgians in 2018 last elected the president by direct popular vote. During the first round of the presidential elections in 2018, out of the total number of registered voters (3,518,877 people), 46.83% of voters took part in the elections, that is, 1,647,878. During the second round, out of the total number of registered voters (3,528,658) participated – 56.36%, that is, 1,988,787 (Election Administration of Georgia, 2019, p. 15–16). Comparison of these data shows that the pandemic did not frighten the citizens (as predicted) and the number of active voters in the pandemic was identical to the elections that were held before the pandemic.

Traditionally, the interest of the Georgian electorate in different choices (presidential, parliamentary, local self-government) is expressed in a relatively different level of activity.

Georgian voters are characterized by relatively low activity during local self-government elections. Unexpectedly, in the context of the pandemic in the local government elections in 2021, 238,273 more voters took part than in the elections of the same type held before the pandemic in 2017. In 2017, voter turnout was only 1,577,503 (45.86% of registered voters) (Election Administration of Georgia, 2017, p. 6). As for the 2016 parliamentary elections before the pandemic, 51.94% of the registered 3,513,884 voters came to polling stations, that is, 1,825,054 people (Election Administration of Georgia, 2016, p. 12). Thus, during the parliamentary elections in the pandemic time, the activity was also relatively high, since in 2021 – 167,837 more citizens voted than in 2016 (see table 2).

Table 2

Election Dates	Before the Pandemic				During the Pandemic	
	2016	2017	2018	2018	2020	2021
Election Types	Parliamentary Elections	Local Self-government Elections	Presidential Elections (First Round)	Presidential Elections (Second Round)	Parliamentary Elections	Local Self-government Elections
Total Number of Eligible Voters	3,513,884	3,440,123	3,518,877	3,528,658	3,511,338	3,498,559
Voters Participating in the Elections	1,825,054 (51.94%)	1,577,503 (45.86%)	1,647,878 (46.83%)	1,988,787 (56.36%)	1,992,891 (56.75%)	1,815,776 (51.92%)

There was an expectation that the Georgian dream would lose power after the expiration of two terms in October 2020 (Chedia, 2020, p. 1). Surprisingly, the ruling Georgian Dream party, as a result of the parliamentary elections in 2020 received 48.15% of the vote and retained a parliamentary majority and formed a one-party government. Another 8 parties managed to pass the electoral threshold and 7 of them variously receiving from 1 to 3.79%. The main opposition party has remained the United National Movement (party of the former President M. Saakashvili) which participated in the elections together with several parties as a single in a bloc and received 27.14%.

During the Local Self-government Elections on October 2, 2021, voters elected 2,068 members of 64 representative bodies (through proportional as well as majoritarian contest) and 64 mayors, including 5 mayors of self-governing cities. The ruling party also completely won the local-self government elections in 2021. Out of 64, only in one the small town – representative of the opposition became the mayor. In some representative bodies – council of municipalities and councils of cities – the opposition was able to gain a majority.

Dualistic Policy with Populism, Manipulation and Polarization

During the pandemic, in a short space of time in Georgia, two different types of elections were held under completely different medical conditions and under two radically different crisis management policies: Relatively strict and relatively mild (see table 3). Relatively strict policy – coincided with positive COVID statistics and parliamentary elections. Relatively mild policy coincided – with negative COVID statistics and local self-government elections. A relatively strict policy was associated with the name of

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, and it seems paradoxical that this policy enjoyed the support of the country's civil society. At least the authorities managed to form a positive public opinion in their favor. Although Georgia is no exception, The University of Cambridge's study shows that the first months of the pandemic saw many political leaders get a boost in ratings and it is a classic "rally round the flag" effect in troubled times (Foa et al., 2022, p. 15). During the pandemic, ruling Georgian Dream Party nominated a new Prime Minister, Irakli Garibashvili – associated with a relatively mild COVID policy. Paradoxically, his policy and results in managing crises in the society caused extremely negative public opinion and a flurry of criticism from the media and NGOs. According to the NDI public opinion poll, if in December 2020 the activities of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia were satisfied with 46% of the country's citizens (NDI, 2020, p.45), then in December 2021, only 27% of the population expressed satisfaction with the work of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili (NDI, 2022, p. 41). If we evaluate not the activities of two different Prime ministers, but the government as an institution, according to the latest data, two years after the start of the pandemic, half of the population of Georgia is satisfied with the actions of the government. It is obvious that discontent among the population has gradually grown and, accordingly, support for the current regime has weakened. If during the first wave of the pandemic 60% positively and 33% negatively assessed the actions of the authorities against the fight against the pandemic, then published data at the beginning of 2022 show that 50% of population had positive attitude about the actions of the authorities, and 43% – had negative attitude (ibidem, p. 49).

Table 3

Period	2020	2021
COVID statistics	Positive	Negative
Public Opinion about crisis management	Positive	Negative
Crisis management style	Relatively Strict	Relatively Mild
Ruling Party	Georgian Dream	Georgian Dream
Prime minister	Giorgi Gakharia	Irakli Gaaribashvili
Election Type	Parliamentary elections	Local Self-Government Elections
The level of political activity from main political subjects	Minimum	Maximum
Topic of public debate	Pandemic	Politics/ Political crisis
The presence of populism	High level	High level
Manipulating the pandemic topic	High level (Main subject – Government and pro-government media)	High level (from the opposition and pro-opposition media)
Level of political polarization	High level	High level
Main Political actors	Medical Doctors (with political affiliations)	Politicians

These two different policies during the pandemic were directly reflected in the dualistic nature of the behavior of political actors: during a time of relatively strict politics, their level of political activity was minimal (unusual for Georgia) and this coincided with parliamentary elections and Gakharia's rule. Due to the formed positive image of the authorities, the opposition announced a moratorium in the political struggle, all activities were canceled, including demonstrations. Opposition media and NGOs were forced to

accept the political agenda of the ruling elite. The maximum level of political activity (usual for Georgia) was evident during the relatively soft politics and this coincided with the elections of local self-government and with the administration of Garibashvili. The presence of populism in both cases during both strict and soft policies was very high. If over the world the pandemic fostered a sense of shared purpose and as argues some scholars that may have reduced the political polarization (Foa et al., 2022, p. 2). In Georgia during two different phases, the level of political polarization remained high. In the first case, the polarization of society was provoked by doctors with political affiliations. In the second case, these were directly politicians who returned to the forefront of the political struggle. In the first case, the topic of the pandemic dominated among the main topics of debate in the public sphere, in the second case, politics returned to the agenda.

Comparative strict policy was based solely on the recommendations and advice of medical doctors. Politicians receded into the background, all major decisions were made by doctors. This created good ground for populism: government propaganda said that the authorities were conferring with professionals. In practice, the government has voluntarily given doctors political power thereby jeopardized one of the principles of democracy – the need for government accountability to the population. The population for the leadership of the country, as usual, elects not medical doctors, but a political team. In Georgia, during the first wave of the pandemic, all responsibility (even political) fell on doctors, and not on the ruling elite.

In democratic regimes the authorities should bear political responsibility, not medical doctors. Due to the fact that in Georgia the population trusts the healthcare system and doctors more than politicians, this forced the political elite to resort to this populist decision in the context of the pandemic – to give “political powers” to medical doctors. According to public opinion polls, 73% of the population fully or partially trusts the healthcare system (NDI, 2022, p. 48). This phenomenon to some extent clearly reflects the global trend studied by Cambridge’ researchers which claim that during a pandemic – citizens increasingly favor technocratic sources of authority, such as having “non-political” experts take decisions (Foa et al., 2022, p. 11). The main Georgian political parties have added medical experts to their ranks. Doctors began to make political statements, clashed with politicians or with the media from a different camp.

During the first wave of the pandemic, the authorities made every effort to turn a few leaders of the medical sector (who were tasked with managing crises) into moral authorities, and then turn these doctors into their party faces. When the BBC published an article titled “Coronavirus: How ‘three musketeers’ helped Georgia fight virus” (Demytrie, 2020) the authorities gave this to society as their huge success. The nickname of the “Three Musketeers” by the international media has been given to three of the country’s top leaders of medical sector. Although during the second stage of the pandemic and under the conditions of another prime minister, the authorities turned away from the three musketeers. Populism during the comparatively mild policy of power of another prime minister was based on fierce competition with his predecessor and was expressed in ignoring the recommendations of doctors. The new propaganda of the authorities said: “If we obey the recommendations of doctors and completely close the country again, that people will die not because of a pandemic, but because of hunger.” When isolated cases of the disease were recorded in the country, under the relatively strict policy – a complete

lockdown and strict bans were introduced. Under the relatively mild policy, despite the dramatic epidemiological situation, the authorities refused to take emergency measures. The authorities even refused to introduce compulsory vaccination despite the categorical demands of doctors. When one of the leaders of public health declared that mandatory vaccination was inevitable, the prime minister categorically stated that he would not allow mandatory vaccination against the will of the population. According to the survey, the almost half of the Georgian population was against vaccination (NDI, 2022, p. 52), so government made a populist decision – not to introduce mandatory vaccination and thereby earn the sympathy of the majority of the population.

There is very interesting finding: how the Georgian political market reacted to the pandemic in a populist way and how it influenced the change in the political landscape to the pandemic. Many political parties have renewed their ranks with medical workers. As a result of the so-called pandemic elections of 2020, the parliament was formed in such a way that out of 150 members of the legislature, 12 deputies (8%) are medical doctors by profession.

Conclusion and Findings

The answer on the main research question of this study is clear: The Pandemic did not exacerbate the status of democracy in Georgia, but simply clearly revealed all the shortcomings of the hybrid regime. Although in the long term there may appear concrete prerequisites for strengthening the country more autocratic tendencies than democratization, since the pandemic related crisis has shown that the main political actors who are prone to populism are in full control and create the public agenda themselves, ignoring public.

The pandemic crisis has caused negative political consequences in the process of democratization and nation-building, first of all, the fact that the growth of populism and a high level of polarization affected not only the political elite, but also the main political institutions such as the media and NGOs. The ruling political elite skillfully used Populist methods and manipulation of public opinion to in the pandemic to maintain power, and the opposition, parties and leaders to discredit the authorities. NGOs and the media in time of crisis instead of being a watchdog, which is an important element of democracy, they betrayed society and also used the pandemic to manipulate public consciousness. This has most damaged the image of these democratic institutions in Georgia during the pandemic. Society or population has demonstrated more commitment to the principle of democratic change of power and, despite the danger of a pandemic, has shown a high level of activity in its political participation in elections.

Although the readiness of the legislation for the crisis was satisfactory, in the case of Georgia it loses practical significance due to the lack of the rule of law, low legal culture, and the unwillingness of privileged groups to obey common rules. The pandemic clearly showed citizens that there can be people in the country who are above the law, and this has undermined confidence in state institutions. The status of democracy in Georgia was damaged not by temporally introduce of the partial abandonment of certain rights of citizens, but by the selective use of these restrictions.

Unfair political competition during the elections, before the pandemic also was characteristic of the political system of Georgia, although the pandemic opened up

new windows of opportunity for the political elite: the presence of COVID regulation was used to solve the political problems of the authorities for pre-election manipulations, when before the elections all those fined for violations of COVID regulations were amnestied.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Beka Chedia

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Beka Chedia

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Beka Chedia

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Beka Chedia

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Beka Chedia

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Wpływ pandemii na trudności procesu demokratycznego w gruzińskim reżimie hybrydowym

Streszczenie

W hybrydowym systemie politycznym Gruzji, w realiach pandemii COVID-19, ludność podlegała kontroli i surowym przepisom. Pojęcia takie jak żelazna kurtyna, godzina policyjna itp. powróciły do słownictwa politycznego. Jak te symbole totalitarnej (sowieckiej) przeszłości mogą wpasować się w proces demokratyzacji? Jaka jest reakcja społeczeństwa, innych aktorów politycznych? Dlaczego i jak pandemia wpłynęła destrukcyjnie na demokrację w Gruzji? Czy grozi to rewizją koncepcji demokratycznego systemu politycznego, co będzie szczególnie trudne dla społeczeństwa posttotalitarnego? W niniejszym artykule autor poddaje analizie Gruzję, a w szczególności: jak instytucje polityczne, elity polityczne, społeczeństwo, media, legislatura państwa były gotowe na nową rzeczywistość i jakie polityczne konsekwencje miałyby ten kryzys w procesie demokratyzacji i budowania narodu. Nieuczciwa rywalizacja polityczna podczas wyborów, wzrost populizmu, częściowa rezygnacja z niektórych praw, pogłębianie się polaryzacji itp. – czy to wyzwania związane tylko z pandemią, czy też zagrażały gruzińskiej demokracji także w „normalnych” czasach?

Słowa kluczowe: Gruzja, reżim hybrydowy, COVID-19, wybory, kryzys, populizm, standardy demokratyczne