

The Impact of Covid19 on Change of Government in Democracies and Countries with Hybrid Regimes

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Abstract:

The present study will examine the impact of Covid19 on change of government in democracies and states with hybrid regimes. In particular, a significant part of the research will be devoted to determining the impact of the current epidemiological situation and the established Covid-regulations on the change of government through elections in countries with democratic and hybrid regimes. . To do this, the results of all types of elections held in countries with democratic and hybrid regimes in 2020, 2019, 2018 and 2017 will be examined. Also, according to the mentioned years, the percentage will be counted in how many cases the change of government took place, and in how many - no. In addition to quantitative indicators, the study will discuss various hypotheses or arguments that could justify why a pandemic and restrictions may have had an impact on election results. In particular, it is interesting to note whether the current situation has allowed the authorities to use the established regulations for their own political purposes and for this reason to complicate the change of government in states with democratic and hybrid regimes.

Thus, the present study will be able to determine how different the rates of change of power as a result of the 2020 elections were compared to previous years. It should also be noted that alternative approaches will be considered in the study, which will increase the credibility of the present paper. However, despite some exceptions, the present study revealed that the 2020 elections were characterized by some difficulties, indicating the influence of Covid19 on the conduct of the electoral process and its consequences.

Key Words: Covid19; Democracy; Government; Elections.

Introduction

The Covid-pandemic , which began in 2020, has had a significant impact on the social, economic and political situation of almost every state. To manage the epidemiological situation, countries were forced to impose a curfew and introduce various regulations that restricted political rights. These regulations have affected various aspects of public life and the political process, including the electoral environment and its rules. In particular, due to the epidemiological situation, almost in all countries the pre-election campaign and the elections themselves were conducted with the background of covid regulations. This circumstance may have complicated the change of government, especially in countries with hybrid regimes, where democratic values are weakly developed.

In view of the above, the present paper aims to investigate whether the pandemic has enabled the ruling political forces to become more involved in the election process and as a result have had a negative impact on the electoral process. Therefore, it is necessary to determine on this basis whether the covidregulations had a real impact on the rate of change of government in countries with democracies and hybrids. The present study is an academic paper, therefore, various research methods will be used for the research purposes, including empirical data analysis.

Purpose of Research

The aim of the present study, as mentioned above, is to determine the impact of Covid19 on the rate of change of government in states with democracies and countries with hybrid regimes. In particular, after analyzing the quantitative indicators, it should be assessed how different the rate of change of government in 2020 was in the countries with democratic and hybrid regimes compared to previous years (2017; 2018; 2019). Therefore, this study should answer the following questions:

- Does the rate of change of government following the 2020 elections differ from those of previous years?
- If the study found that the percentages of change of government in 2020 differ from those of previous years, then what were the reasons for this change?

Thus, in order to answer the above questions, this paper will use various quantitative indicators, qualitative research or empirical analysis, which will enable the study of the role

of restrictions against co-epidemic in the change of governments in hybrid countries, which ultimately achieves the research goal.

Methodology

The study aims to determine a causal relationship, on the one hand, between the Covid19 (independent variable) and the change of government (dependent variable) through elections in countries with democracies and hybrids. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the results of all types of elections in 2020 in the target group countries. Then, it is necessary to determine the percentage of cases of change of government, and to compare this data with the figures of previous years.

The target group of the study is the countries of democratic and hybrid regimes. First of all, for the purposes of the study, it should be determined which countries are the democracies and hybrid regimes. To do this, the study will use data published by Freedom House in 2020. In particular, the organization is considered to be one of the most authoritative and reliable sources in the academic field. Freedom House uses the Gastil Index to measure the degree of governance of states, which measures the degree of civil and political rights in a state. In particular, on a 7-point scale, three types of countries are defined on the basis of the corresponding scores for the states: 1) Free; 2) Partly-free; 3) Not Free. In the present study, the target countries are the first (Free) and the second category (Partly-Free) countries.

The study will also use the data published by The Economist Intelligence Unit, which provides an additional indicator for classifying states' regimes and increases the reliability of the study. The EIU classifies states by governance on a 10-point scale that divides countries into four

types: 1) Full Democracy; 2) Flawed Democracy; 3) Hybrid Regime; 4) Authoritarian. In the present study, the target group of countries are the first (Full democracy), the second (Flawed Democracy) and the third category (Hybrid Regime) countries.

States with democratic and hybrid regimes were deliberately selected for this study, as elections are held regularly in such countries and it is possible to change the government. It should be noted, however, that the hybrid regime is characterized by certain elements characteristic of an authoritarian regime, such as voter bribery, intimidation, obstruction of the activities of opposition parties, and so on. Consequently, Covid19 could have a real impact on the conduct of the 2020 elections in the countries with hybrid regimes. Thus, it should be noted that the authorities were given the opportunity to use more power and introduce a state of emergency, as well as to restrict the basic human rights recognized by the Constitution by imposing various regulations, which itself could affect the electoral process.

However, it should be noted that the study will not consider data from authoritarian or other types of non-democratic states. In particular, elections in this type of state has a purely formal nature, and opposition political parties are not given a real opportunity to change government through elections. The main reasons for this are the peculiarities of authoritarian regimes, such as: persecution of opposition political parties and their leaders, harassment of critical media, voter bribery or intimidation, use of disproportionate force against peaceful demonstrators, falsification of ballot papers, etc. Therefore, in countries with authoritarian regimes, it is self-evident that the possibility of a change of government through elections is virtually ruled out, making the analysis of such state data irrelevant to the present study.

After defining the countries with democratic and hybrid regimes, the results of all types of elections held in the countries with the mentioned regimes in 2020, 2019, 2018 and 2017 should be examined. In particular, the percentages of the results of all types of elections in democratic and hybrid countries in 2020, 2019, 2018 and 2017 will be calculated on the basis of quantitative indicators. Especially, in each election, it must be determined whether there has been a change of government. It is important to clarify that the present study will discuss the results of both presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

For the purposes of the study, it needs to be clarified what the change of government means. In particular, the change of government following the parliamentary elections is a case in which the majority of voters supported the opposition political parties. As a result, the ruling party lost its parliamentary majority. Also considered a change of government is the case when the opposition parties received a sufficient number of votes, which made it possible to form a coalition government.

As for the presidential election, in this case the change of government will mean all the "cases" where the candidate nominated by the opposition party won in the first or second round and replaced the incumbent president. In the case of local self-government elections, attention will be paid to the number of votes received by opposition political parties in this or that administrative unit.

The above-mentioned years were deliberately selected. Especially, comparison of the results of the elections held in 2017, 2018 and 2019 with the results of the 2020 elections will show how different the rates of change of government were between the figures of 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

In addition to quantitative research, this paper will also use qualitative research methods, such as reviewing a specific "case", a scientific article, information published by an authoritative organization, or the media related to the results of elections in the states. For example, the study will use materials published by the BBC, Human Rights Watch and the OSCE. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used to achieve the research goal.

It should also be noted that the use of the above research methods ensures the reliability and validity of the research. In particular, in terms of reliability, the measurement mechanisms used in the study (analysis of election results in respective years in countries with democratic and hybrid regimes) are a reliable indicator of the achievement of the research objective. As for the validity, the variables presented in the study are useful for determining the causality, since the comparison of the percentages of the election results according to the respective years objectively reflects the existing data and is not based on a subjective assessment of various authors.

Also, after the results of the 2020 and 2019 elections are examined and the percentage of change of government in each year is determined, the above results will be compared with the results of the 2018 and 2017 elections. In particular, in this way, on the one hand, the validity of the survey will be ensured, and on the other hand, it will be possible to determine whether there is a significant difference between the results of the elections held in 2020-2019, 2019-2018 and 2018-2017.

Analysis

As mentioned above, Covid19 had an impact on the economic and political environment of almost every state. Covid19 affected on the rules of the election campaign and elections itself, which was mainly due to the current epidemiological situation and the restrictions imposed by the government. Therefore it is interesting to determine whether: the enacted regulations contributed to the victory of the authorities in the countries with democratic and hybrid regimes during the elections or did less restrictions contribute to the victory of the opposition political parties, which requires to discuss the following arguments to support this hypothesis:

a) Impact on International observer organizations

First of all, it should be noted that the restriction of international traffic by states has had a significant impact on various aspects, including the electoral process. In particular, in some cases, for example in the Mongolian parliamentary elections¹, due to restrictions on international traffic, international observation missions were not allowed to attend the elections. Consequently, the current situation was detrimental to the electoral process, as international observer organizations are impartial and authoritative organizations that objectively assess the electoral environment and election irregularities. Therefore, the authorities were allowed to use the current situation for their own electoral purposes, as less involvement of international observer missions in the electoral process encouraged the ruling party to violate electoral legislation.

¹ Mendee Jargalsaikhan, asiapacific.ca, “Democracy in the Time of Covid-19: Mongolia’s Parliamentary Election”, July 14, 2020
<https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/democracy-time-covid-19-mongolias-parliamentary-election>

b) Impact on Political Parties

Restrictions imposed by the government also affected the activities of opposition political parties. In particular, in some cases, for example in the pre-election campaign of the Serbian parliamentary elections², due to the epidemiological situation, the constitutionally recognized freedom of assembly and demonstration was restricted, and it was forbidden to gather more than a certain number of people in outside . This regulation, in fact, deprived the opposition political parties the opportunity to express their protest against decisions made by the government. Also, most importantly, they were not given the opportunity to hold meetings in different cities or regions and meet with their own voters, which is one of the important parts of conducting a full-fledged election campaign.

c) Impact on Voters

Government restrictions are also linked to creating certain barriers for voters. In particular, it is noteworthy that the authorities imposed local restrictions to control the epidemiological situation, which meant closing the cities or the settlements. Consequently, it further complicated the mobility of voters to the polling stations. Another important circumstance is that, due to the fear of spreading the virus in general, it was possible for a certain number of opposition voters to refrain from going to the polls, as opposed to pro-government voters, who are usually easier to mobilize using administrative resources.

² ndi.org, “Serbia’s June 2020 Elections”

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Serbia%E2%80%99s%20June%202020%20Elections%20Public%20Report.pdf>

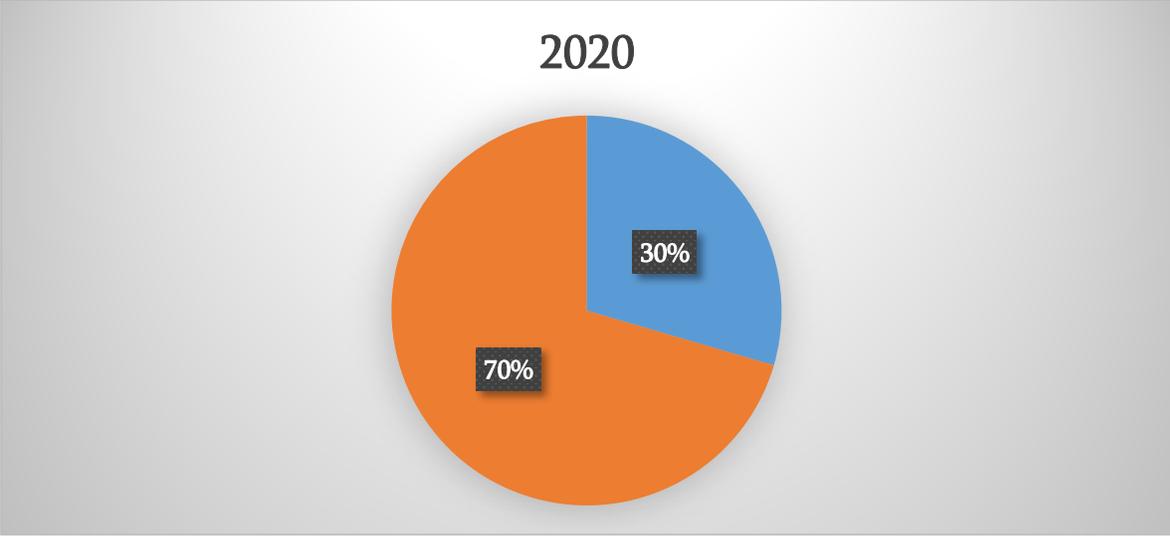
d) Impact on the pro-government campaign

The victory of the government in the elections was in some cases facilitated by its effective policy against Covid19. In particular, successfully managing the epidemiological situation and maintaining low rates of deaths and infections by taking various precautionary measures helped to popularize the government and increase its prestige, which in itself could have a positive impact on the election results of the ruling political party.

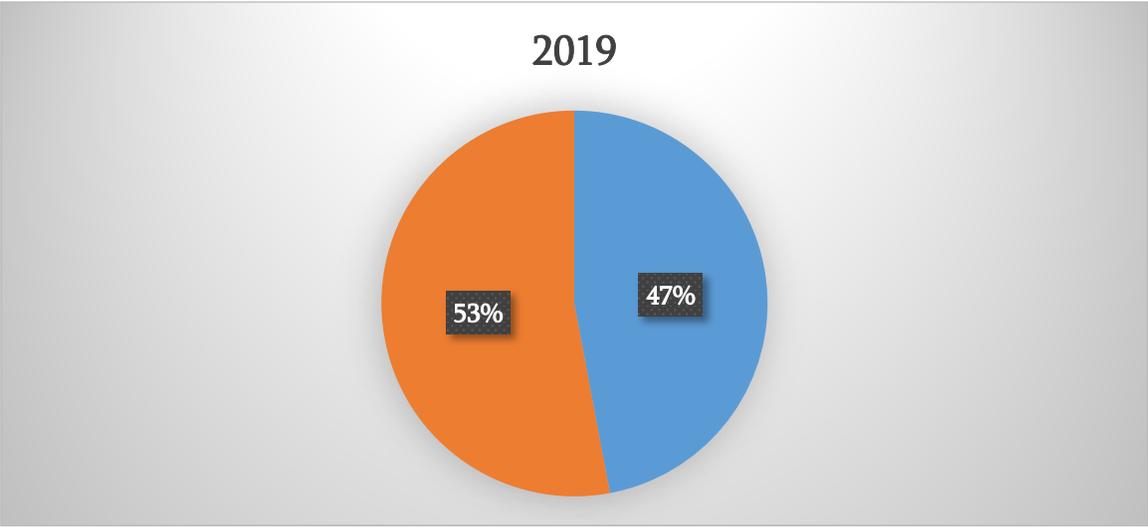
Empirical Analysis

Based on data from Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit used in the study, states of democratic and hybrid regimes were identified. Data on elections in democratic and hybrid countries were also established using the IPU Parline database.

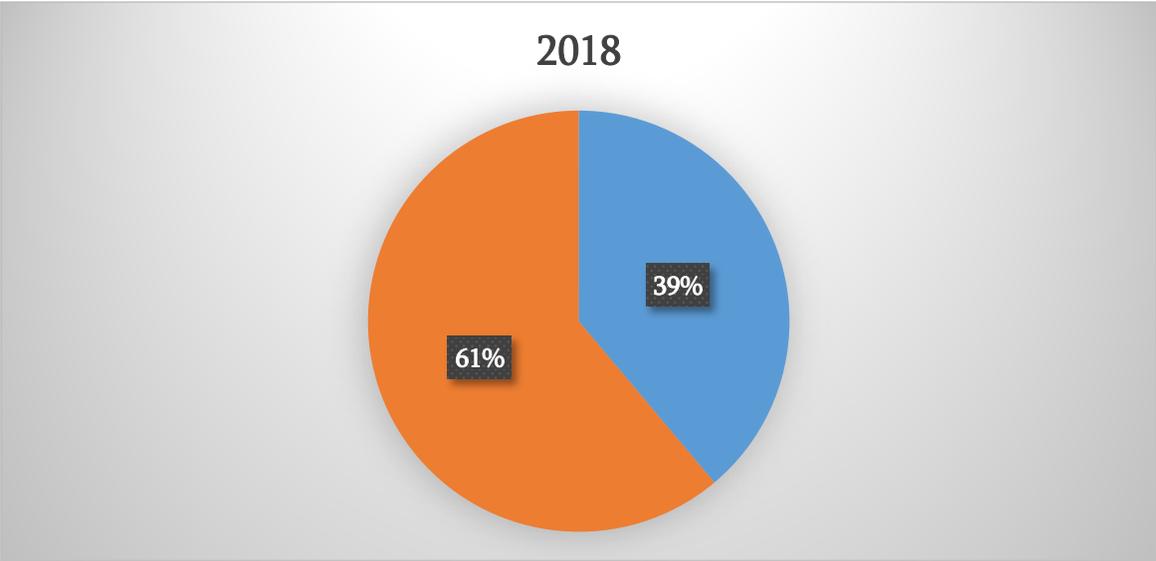
In 2020, a total of 45 presidential, parliamentary and local elections were held in countries with democracies and hybrids, of which 30% had a change of government and 70% did not. It should be noted, however, that since the 2020 elections, 22 have been held in countries with hybrid regimes and 23 in democracies.



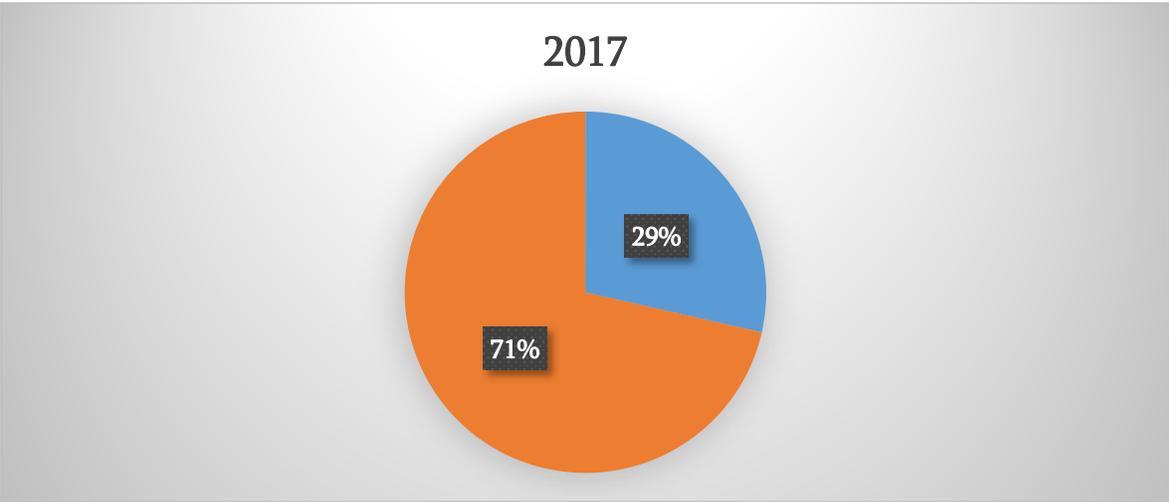
In 2019, a total of 50 presidential, parliamentary and local elections were held, of which 47% had a change of government and 53% did not. In addition, it was held in 22 countries with hybrid regimes and in 28 democracies. Therefore, it is evident that even in this case, the rate of change of government was lower, but compared to 2020, the rate of change of government is much higher, which supports the hypothesis expressed in the present study that in 2020 the rate of change of government was lower in democracies and hybrid regimes.



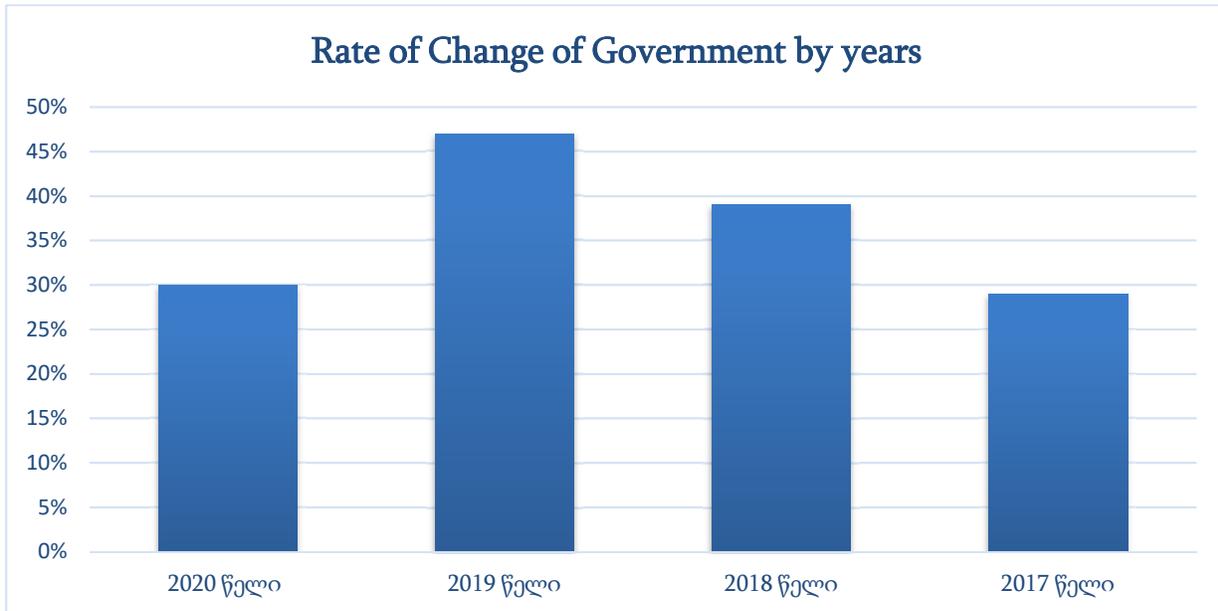
As for the elections held in countries with democratic and hybrid regimes in 2018, a total of 35 parliamentary, presidential and local elections were held, of which 39% were in power and 61% were not. However, 22 elections were held in hybrid countries and 13 in democracies. In this case, it is evident that the rate of change of government is lower compared to the results of the 2019 elections, however, this figure is still higher than the percentage of change of government as a result of the elections in 2020.



In the case of the 2017 parliamentary, presidential and local elections, a total of 32 elections were held, of which 29% had a change of government and 71% did not. However, in this case the rate of change of government is the lowest even compared to 2020.



The diagram below shows the general data examined as a result of the present study on the percentages of change of government by the study period.



For the purposes of the present study, it is important to pay attention to the comparative analysis of election results. In particular, according to the given diagram, based on the comparison of the results of the elections held in 2017 and 2018, it is determined that the percentage of change of government in 2018 was much higher than it was in 2017. Also, a similar case is observed in the case of the 2019 and 2018 election results, where the percentage of change of government in 2019 was higher than in 2018. However, there are already different figures when comparing the data for 2020 and 2019, since in 2020 the rate of change of government was much lower than in 2019. Therefore, it can be said that the dynamics of change of government was increasing during the study period and the percentage of change of

government in the countries with democracies and hybrid regimes increased with each subsequent election year. Explain the influence of Covid19 and the restrictions imposed by the government on the electoral process.

The study found that overall, the percentage of changes in government in the 2020 elections in countries with democracies and hybrid regimes was lower than in other years, except for the 2017 data. Therefore, the focus may be on certain issues. In particular, it is possible that in the states where there was a change of government in 2020, on the one hand, this was due to the wrong policies of the government, and on the other hand, it is possible that in various countries there were no strict restrictions and the government had less opportunity to influence elections. Therefore, in the case of the 2020 elections, two cases are interesting: in the states where the change of government took place, was it due to the fact that: a) the government did not manage the epidemiological situation well; Or b) there were fewer regulations imposed by the authorities that prevented the election campaign and the election process from being disrupted. And in the cases where a change of government failed, was it due to the strict restrictions imposed by the government, as a result of which the ruling party was able to interfere in the elections and use the imposed regulations for political purposes. These circumstances require further analysis by considering specific examples. Given the above, specific examples of countries with democratic and hybrid regimes need to be considered separately.

a) Covid19 prevented a change of government

In countries with hybrid regimes, Covid19 has had a significant impact on the conduct of elections. In particular, Covid19 prevented a change of government in some states. For example, in the 2020 Serbian parliamentary elections, the ruling team (SNS-Coalition) won 60% of the vote. In particular, due to the state of emergency imposed by the Serbian authorities, opposition political parties were not allowed to conduct a full-fledged election campaign and meet with their supporters. So, it had an impact on the election results. However, the NDI report states that the Serbian government used measures against the Covid19-pandemic for its own PR campaign, which in turn contributed to the victory of the ruling party in the elections.³

b) Government has changed due to political or economic circumstances

In addition to the specific cases discussed above, it is also necessary to analyze cases where the government has changed, which was largely due to a political or economic crisis. For example, in the 2020 Bolivian general election, the candidate of the opposition political party (Movement for Socialism) won, receiving 55% of the vote. The Bolivian election is a different case, as the change of government here depended more on the economic and political crisis in the country, rather than Covid19 and its subsequent regulations. In particular, the results of the 2019 general elections in Bolivia were annulled and the population had a sharply anti-government sentiment, which in turn had an impact on the re-run in the 2020 general elections and contributed to the victory of the opposition political party.

³ ndi.org, “Serbia’s June 2020 Elections”
<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Serbia%E2%80%99s%20June%202020%20Elections%20Public%20Report.pdf>

C) Less restrictions and change of government

Covid19 also had an impact on the change of government following the 2020 elections, as did the results of the elections in Montenegro⁴ and northern Macedonia, where the number of infected people was not as high as in other countries. At the same time, there were no strict restrictions in these countries, which is why the opposition political parties did not interfere in the conduct of the election campaign. Consequently, the change of government in the two countries mentioned above may have been facilitated by the existence of fewer restrictions and the full-fledged running of the election campaign by opposition political parties.

The present study also needs to consider specific cases of parliamentary, presidential or local elections in democracies in 2020.

A) The government has changed due to the economic crisis

Covid19 had a relatively different impact on elections in democracies and their results. For example, in the 2020 parliamentary elections in Suriname, the Progressive Reform Party won 39% of the vote. In the case of Suriname, the change of government was largely caused due to the economic crisis, which was the result of the policies of the ruling party⁵. However, the defeat of the incumbent president and his party in the parliamentary elections was caused due

⁴ ec.europa.eu, “Key findings of the 2020 Report on Montenegro”

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hr/country_20_1796

⁵ usnews.com, “Suriname's President Loses Election, Leaves Economic Chaos”, June 16, 2020

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-06-16/surinames-president-loses-election-leaves-economic-chaos>

to the fact that the president himself was convicted of drug trafficking, which negatively affected his rating.

B) The change of government was prevented by restrictions imposed by the ruling party

The parliamentary elections held in Mongolia⁶ in 2020 should be considered. In particular, the ruling party (Mongolian People's Party) won the election with 44% of the vote. Mongolia has imposed various regulations to manage the epidemiological situation, which has prevented opposition political parties from meeting with their supporters and exercising their constitutional rights.⁷

C) The government has not changed due to the credibility of the population towards the ruling political party

In addition to the above, there are also cases when the government has not changed, but this was mainly due to the fact that the population did not have a strong dissatisfaction with the government. For example, although the government in Poland, Romania and Croatia has not changed, the elections in these countries have been positively assessed by the OSCE and no significant irregularities have been reported during the elections, indicating that the government has not had a negative impact on the elections. And the population had the opportunity to express their will in the elections. Also the parliamentary elections in Slovakia

⁶ dw.com, "Mongolia elections: Landslide win for incumbent MPP"

<https://www.dw.com/en/mongolia-elections-landslide-win-for-incumbent-mpp/a-53933958>

⁷ Mendee Jargalsaikhan, asiapacific.ca, "Democracy in the Time of Covid-19: Mongolia's Parliamentary Election", July 14, 2020

<https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/democracy-time-covid-19-mongolias-parliamentary-election>

should be mentioned, where the government changed, which was largely due to the difficult political situation in the country, rather than the relatively light restrictions imposed by the government.

Thus, the cases discussed in the present study show that Covid19 and the regulations in place to manage the current epidemiological situation have had a significant impact on the conduct of the election and its outcome. However, it should be noted that in some cases Covid19 was not the only determinant of the election results and the victory of a political party, as different indicators, such as economic or political crisis, could have influenced the change of government or the retention of a political party in different countries.

Conclusion

The study found that Covid19 had an impact on the course and outcome of the 2020 election. In particular, the regulations imposed by the government to manage the epidemiological situation, which restricted human rights, prevented a change of government in countries with democracies and hybrids, as evidenced by empirical analysis.

empirical analysis has shown that Covid19 had an impact on elections in both democracies and hybrids. However, it has had a particular impact on countries with hybrid regimes, as the examples discussed above show that the authorities used the restrictions for various political purposes, such as restricting international traffic, which prevented international observer missions from conducting full-fledged surveillance in various countries . Opposition political parties were not allowed to conduct a full-fledged election campaign as a result of restrictions of fundamental constitutional rights, including restrictions on freedom of assembly and

expression; Restrictions also violated constitutional human rights, preventing opposition groups from protesting against the government, including dissatisfaction with the epidemiological or economic situation, and so on.

Based on the empirical analysis used in the present study and the review of specific "cases", it is possible to identify the four main indicators that influenced the change of government or the ruling party in the countries with democratic and hybrid regimes.

1) Strict restrictions imposed by the government have allowed the ruling political party to remain in power, preventing opposition political parties, their supporters, and observer missions from actively participating in the election process.

2) The success of the ruling party in general has been facilitated by the successful policies of the ruling party in general and also in the context of managing the epidemiological situation, which is the main reason why the voters supported the ruling party again.

3) The victory of the opposition political party was facilitated by the severe social and political crisis in the country. Consequently, as a result of the dissatisfaction of the majority of the population, a change of government took place through elections.

4) The victory of the opposition political party was facilitated by the few restrictions imposed by the government and the existence of a competitive environment, as a result of which the opposition political parties were able to conduct their pre-election campaign without delay.

Thus, the present study found that Covid19 had a significant impact on the course and results of the 2020 elections in countries with democracies and hybrid regimes, as evidenced by the

percentage change of government during the study period. It is noteworthy that in some cases the authorities used the pandemic for their own political purposes and restricted human rights more than there was a real need for it. This has significantly damaged democratic values and set a dangerous precedent for large-scale restrictions imposed by the authorities, including endangering the electoral process and the activities of opposition political parties, especially during the recession of democracy in the world.

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