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**ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЕ УЧАСТИЕ В ПЕРИОД
БОРЬБЫ С COVID-19:
МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ РЕТРОСПЕКЦИЯ**

**THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
DURING THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-
19: INTERNATIONAL RETROSPECTION**

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Аннотация

В статье авторы рассматривают влияние пандемии COVID-19 и мер по борьбе с ней на политическое участие. Они доказывают, что в отдельных государствах ограничительные меры увеличили популярность ультраправых политических сил, трансформировали модели политического участия в пользу неконвенциональной формы, а также привели к укреплению авторитарных тенденций и, следовательно, ограничению политического участия.

Ключевые слова: политическое участие, кризис, выборы, протестная активность, COVID-19.

Abstract

In the article the authors consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on political participation. They prove that restrictive measures in some states have increased the popularity of ultra-right political forces, transformed the models of political participation in favor of an unconventional form, and also led to the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies and, consequently, the restriction of political participation.

Key words: political participation, crisis, elections, protest activity, COVID-19.

Introduction and relevance. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a multi-crisis in many countries of the world: economic crises associated with the layoff of thousands of employees and the suspension of business activities, crises of public support systems that turned out to be unprepared for huge volumes of transfers, health systems crises that were slow to respond to new challenges, etc. It could be expected that in such a crisis, societies would rally around their governments, which were required to take decisive action to protect the life, health and well-being of citizens. However, in general, this did not follow and the governments failed to enforce a “political lockdown”.

The crisis caused by COVID-19 in some cases exposed the existing contradictions between the state and society, central and local governments, in others it suspended the process of resolving political conflicts, in others it aggravated the political struggle and undermined trust in official sources. Political participation has not been left out of these

processes, which makes his study, namely the study of participation during the COVID crisis, extremely necessary and timely.

Governments have taken quite drastic measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, including the imposition of a state of emergency, censorship motivated by the need to limit the flow of disinformation, postponement of elections, and a ban on protests. These measures, aimed at preserving the life and health of the population, have caused widespread social discontent in many systems and the strengthening of the opposition camp, which had no examples in the past. Such processes have not yet found sufficient reflection in political science, requiring a deep study of the relevant mechanisms and cause-and-effect relationships.

Materials and methods. The results of this study were obtained using various theories and concepts recognized in modern political science. First of all, we relied on the general theory of political participation, a significant contribution to the development of which was made by J. Det, L. Milbright, I. Peters, J. Theokaris [1, 2, 3]. The concept of crisis political participation, a new concept reflected in the works of, for example, A. Boin and A. McCollen [4], made it possible to identify the directions of the impact of the COVID crisis on political participation. The concept of informational authoritarianism by S. Guriev and D. Trisman [5] served as one of the justifications for the conclusion that authoritarian tendencies are strengthening against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of social splits by S. Lipset and S. Rokkan [6] and its modern variations [7] formed the basis of the chapters on electoral and protest participation during COVID -19.

At the same time, in order to operationalize the array of empirical material, applied methods were widely used in the study: content analysis of news reports, party materials, regulatory documents, and case studies.

Literature review. There is now a growing number of scientific publications on the political implications of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. P.A. Barakhvostov, A.N. Kuryukin [8, 9], as well as E. Wang, P. Guasti, M. Orsini, F. Ortega, M. Todorovich and others analyze the growth of authoritarian elements in the politics of various countries, explained by the need to contain the spread of COVID-19 [10, 11, 12, 13].

Works of domestic researchers A.S. Badaeva, N.A. Baranova, E.E. Vorobieva, Yu.R. Guseva, Z.A. Jade, A.A. Ponomarenko [14, 15, 16, 17, 18] and foreign researchers J. Vondreys, S. Greer, T. Landman, K. Mudde, L. Splendore, M. Falkenbach [19, 20, 21] touch upon the topic of electoral participation in time of COVID-19. In the center of M.A. Belova, T.V. Epifanova, T.A. Zakaurtseva, O.V. Kuznetsova [22, 23]; D. Bratic, M. Kowalewski, G. Martin [24, 25, 26] protest participation initiated by government measures to combat COVID-19.

The study of the relevant literature leads to the conclusion that many works were carried out outside the framework of political science, and, consequently, from other methodological positions, with other assumptions and conclusions that do not give much for the development of this scientific discipline. Many problem areas shaped by the political effects of COVID-19 still remain unexplored, which is largely due to the novelty of the phenomenon under study. At the same time, there are no comprehensive political science studies that would analyze political participation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and discussion. At the moment, there are three approaches to understanding the essence of political participation: "optimistic", "pessimistic" and "realistic". From the point of view of the "optimistic" approach, political participation is the direct participation of citizens in the decision-making process. According to the "pessimistic" approach, political participation is the participation of citizens in political discussions unfolding around certain pressing problems of socio-political reality. In a "realistic" approach, political participation is the totality of citizens' attempts, both successful and unsuccessful, to influence the political decision-making process. Political participation, considered from the standpoint of a "realistic" approach, can take a wide variety of forms, characterized by seven criteria: scope

of involvement, degree of involvement, incentives for participation, type of participants, environment for participation, type of activity, and compliance with legal and social norms.

Political participation depends on many determinants that influence its nature and extent. Contextual factors such as economic inequality, corruption, government repression are "explicit" determinants that have a so-called "Political recognition". Along with them, there are "implicit" determinants that are deliberately depoliticized by the ruling political elite and state structures, which, under certain conditions, leads to a surge in political mobilization. Measures to combat COVID-19 turned out to be just such an "implicit" determinant. With the onset of the pandemic, the governments of most countries declared that the fight against it is the business of the scientific community, as well as state and public structures, which must strictly implement its recommendations. The governments that made decisions to strengthen state control over the development of the situation in the country, to temporarily restrict civil rights in order to avoid depopulation, hoped that citizens, feeling political concern, would give up political activity around the COVID-19 problem. However, the consequence of such government activity was the growth of political participation of citizens in social and political life and the transformation of its models.

The crisis is a special environmental determinant that reinforces the influence of other factors on political participation. The crisis allows governments to take extraordinary measures that would otherwise be impossible due to public resistance, excuse them for managerial mistakes and failures, and block the actions of the opposition forces, accusing them of unwillingness to serve the common good in an emergency. All this increases the level of social discontent and entails a change in models of political participation: electoral preferences change and the likelihood of protest participation increases, which is explained by the radicalization of public sentiment and the temporary consolidation of the main political forces. At the same time, governments, as a rule, are rarely able to prevent and minimize the consequences of this or that crisis, as a result, it partly delegitimizes the ruling political forces and increases the attractiveness of forces remote from government posts. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a crisis in many countries, which means that the models of political participation in them have been influenced not only by the pandemic itself and measures to combat it, but also by the crisis surrounding it all.

COVID-19 had the most noticeable impact on the political orientations of citizens of European countries, who, using various conventional means, primarily electoral participation, demonstrated increased support for ultra-right parties over the period under study. The success of such parties was largely due to the fact that they offered an alternative vision of the situation and alternative ways to overcome the crisis caused by the pandemic. The fight against COVID-19 has given rise to fears in European societies about the incompetence of the ruling elites, who offer solutions that are inadequate to the situation, fears related to the strengthening of state control over personal life and the promotion of new supranational initiatives by the EU leadership that undermine national sovereignty. Such fears have always been exploited by far-right parties to attract their supporters, but now they have taken on a new meaning, directly related to health and economic well-being. The analysis showed that citizens supported a variety of ultra-right parties in the European political space: government and opposition parties that are quite popular and have lost confidence, established ones and new ones created "by chance".

Government measures to combat COVID-19 stimulated citizens who were dissatisfied with such measures or showed an interest in destabilization to protest activity, which took the form of both peaceful demonstrations and riots. Protest activity generally did not lead to the desired political responses, even in systems where it had a legal status. Activity has subsided as lockdowns eased, following an improvement in the overall situation with the spread of the virus. At the same time, the variety of goals pursued by the participants in the protests (opposing the so-called primary and then secondary measures), the wide social composition of the protesters, the frequency and seriality of protest actions, which in some cases stretched

for months, allows us to conclude that during the period of struggle against COVID-19 in certain systems there has been a marked transformation of models of political participation, characterized by a shift in favor of an unconventional form.

During the fight against COVID -19, the number of repressive actions and cases of censorship increased in a number of states, which is one of the main signs of the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies. Governments and political leaders, given emergency powers, penalized non-compliance with restrictive measures and dissemination of unofficial information about the coronavirus, banned coverage of events related to COVID-19 and closed access to key sources of information, and collected information about citizens that plays an important role in the so-called. covert repression, which together reflected the changing nature of political regimes. At the same time, with the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies, citizens faced limited opportunities for political participation, both in conventional and non-conventional forms: the authorities postponed election dates, pursuing, among other things, their political interests, and blocked demonstrations that were previously allowed, fearing opposition mobilization in the current crisis situation.

Conclusion. As a result of the study, the following was achieved:

- systematized approaches to understanding the essence of political participation by highlighting the "optimistic", "pessimistic" and "realistic" approaches, and developed a typology of forms of such participation, including seven classification criteria;
- a distinction is made between "explicit" and "implicit" determinants of political participation and it is proved that measures to combat COVID-19 are an "implicit" determinant that influenced participation patterns, despite its deliberate depoliticization by the ruling political elite and state structures;
- it was revealed that the crisis, including the crisis caused in many countries by the COVID-19 pandemic, is a special, separate from other factors, determinant that enhances their influence on electoral preferences and the likelihood of protest participation;
- based on the analysis of European data, it was found that the fight against COVID-19 influenced the political orientations of many citizens of European countries, implemented by them in a conventional way, since increased electoral support for various ultra-right parties was demonstrated;
- it is substantiated that state measures to combat COVID-19 have increased the level of protest activity of citizens, thereby transforming the model of political participation in favor of an unconventional form;
- guided by the facts of an increase in the number of repressive actions and an increase in cases of censorship aimed at restricting freedom of speech, it has been proved that, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, authoritarian tendencies in the government system of individual states have strengthened and, consequently, the political participation of citizens in the political life of their countries has been limited.

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