VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

What Solidarity? Pandemic Governance Discourse in Lithuania, 2020-2022

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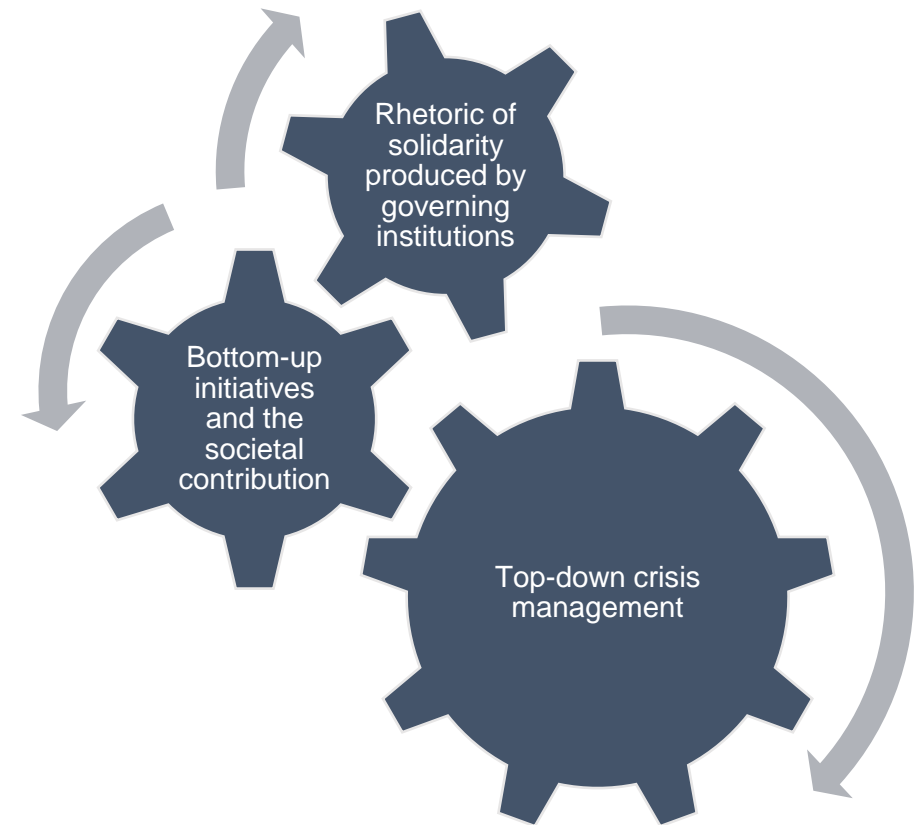PhD candidate Rasa Bortkevičiūtė

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Research problem. Why to look at the discourse of pandemic governance?

- Context of the COVID-19: collective behavior rather than the mix of policy instruments was the key to controlling the pandemic

- Pleas of solidarity from various actors involved in the governance of the pandemic

- How is the solidarity understood and its discourses constructed by the national governments to manage the COVID-19 pandemic?

Rhetoric of solidarity produced by governing institutions

Bottom-up initiatives and the societal contribution

Top-down crisis management

Theoretical approach

Major contexts for the use of solidarity vocabulary (Bayertz, 1999):

- **Solidarity and morality**. Solidarity includes not only obligation to act, but to refrain from the action as well

- **Solidarity and society**. Solidarity as society's glue to secure emotional cohesion and mutual support of its atomized members

- **Solidarity and liberation**. Solidarity as a tool to achieve a societal or political change

- **Solidarity and welfare state**. Solidarity focuses on redistribution of financial and other resources and identifies groups of citizens in need (e.g. poor, sick, or elderly)

The Lithuanian context of the COVID-19 management

Generally, the Lithuanian Governments employed a rather **paternalistic crisis management style.** This is a typical feature of the CEE countries, especially during the initial stages of crisis management

The Government of Saulius Skvernelis (2020)

- One of the most rapid and stringent responses across the EU

- Centralized crisis management with a limited stakeholders' engagement

- Dominance of top-level political authorities in communication and decision-making

The Government of Ingrida Šimonytė (2020-2022)

- Stringent response ("accelerate – break") and change of the management strategy

- Centralized crisis management structure with more horizontal elements

- Shading involvement of the top-level political authorities and dispersing picture of the crisis communicators

Research methodology

- **Timeframe:** February 2020 – May 2022
- **Object:** (in)direct references to solidarity in the public communication of the Lithuanian authorities
- **Data:** 619 statements of the key decision-makers from 13 governmental institutions, published on the website of the Lithuanian Radio and Television
- **Discourse analysis:** an in-depth investigation of solidarity rhetoric of the Lithuanian decision-makers, focusing on:

    1. Scope of the solidarity vocabulary

    2. Differences in the solidarity rhetoric of institutional speakers

    3. How the opposite of solidarity is constructed

    4. What notion of solidarity is embedded in the rhetoric

The notion of solidarity in the discourse of the Lithuanian Governments

	The Government of Skvernelis	The Government of Šimonytė
Scope of the solidarity vocabulary	Core: *unity, solidarity, togetherness* Solidarity acts as an appeal to and a test of the population's *rationality, understanding and consciousness* *Responsibility:* a commitment and a basis for judgement	Core: *unity, concord* Emphasis is placed on *consciousness* and *understanding* that is expressed in an empathetic, compassionate way Shared *responsibility* for the future Increased scope of the communicators
Differences in the rhetoric	Depoliticization and technical use of the *solidarity*	Instrumental use of solidarity vocabulary: initially, collective achievement of the aims of pandemic management *(save lives* vs. *come back to normalcy),* later – pragmatic solidarity
Opposite for solidarity	*Irresponsible* behaviour	*Disobedience* for the measures in place
Notion of solidarity	Vertical	Vertical ("carrots and sticks")

Instead of conclusions

- Solidarity is used as a tool for the implementation of pandemic management strategy: rationality of the individual rather than moral feeling;

- Paternalistic governance: poorly expressed dimension "solidarity and liberation";

- The calls for solidarity change depending on the course and the results of the pandemic management strategy (saving lives → back to the normalcy → pragmatic reasoning).

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Thank you for comments and suggestions!

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