



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE



Lietuvos
mokslo
taryba

This project has received funding from the Research Council of Lithuania (LMTLT), agreement No S-VIS-23-16

The Impact of the Polycrisis on Systemic Change in Lithuania: Centralisation and Inter-institutional Cooperation Amid Geopolitical Turbulence



Presentation for the IIAS-DARPG 2025 conference, New Delhi, India, 10-14
February 2025

Vitalis Nakrošis



CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

A series of **transboundary crises** in European countries over the last five years

Recent crises such as the migration crisis and the energy (cost of living) crisis catalysed by **the increasing aggressiveness of the authoritarian states**

Since these interconnected crises overlap in time, feature a significant degree of complexity, and generate spillover effects, they can be analysed as **a single polycrisis**

POLYCRISIS

The simultaneous occurrence of at least two individual crises characterised by high complexity and/or spill-over effects

In addition to implementing a multi-level response, it is necessary to engage in the management of inter-state conflicts (in particular through **economic sanctions**) due to the aggressiveness of the authoritarian states

RESEARCH GAP

Knowledge about interconnected transboundary crises, especially those overlapping in time and space, remains shallow (Homer-Dixon et al., 2022; Anghel and Jones, 2023)

Physical, financial or governance linkages among individual crises are seldom explored (SAPEA, 2022; Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, 2022)

The field of crises and disaster studies remains dominated by single case studies (Wolbers et al., 2021), with limited attention to cross-country or cross-case comparisons

Longitudinal approach should allow capturing shifts between different phases of a crisis and grasping its spillover effects (Kuipers et al., 2022)

PURPOSE

The purpose of the paper is to assess the impact of the recent polycrisis on systemic change in Lithuania

Particular interest in examining how the country's response to the polycrisis has led to reforms in its crisis management system and associated institutional arrangements for economic sanctions

These reforms have the potential of strengthening the overall resilience of the country's administration and, if properly implemented, putting pressure on the aggressive behaviour of authoritarian states



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Insights from new institutionalism and complexity theory

Ideas from security studies, especially concerning reliance on economic sanctions as a non-military response

	Complexity theory	
Logic of change	Low complexity	High complexity
Normative pressures (the logic of appropriateness)	Professional self-organisation	Professional interdependence and (non-linear) interactions
Coercive pressures (the logic of consequentiality)	Political control	Multi-level political bargaining

OUR METHODS

The case study approach by focusing on the process of crisis management and systemic change

Causal process tracing (Kay and Baker, 2014) that allows to check whether a theoretical explanation corresponds to actual mechanisms 'on the ground'

Semi-structured interviews with key decision-makers and participants of crisis management, with the results of 9 interviews used in the paper

A flexible pattern matching to ensure 'matching between theoretical patterns and empirical observations (Bouncken et al., 2021)

FROM THE OLD SYSTEM TO A NEW SYSTEM

The old system

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), Lithuania's crisis management system was fragmented, with **the Fire and Rescue Department** under the Ministry of the Interior managing emergencies and **the Prime Minister's Office** handling state-level crises (like the global financial crisis)

The previous emergency management system heavily relied on **hierarchy and top-down command** within the Fire and Rescue Department ([Widmalm](#) et al., 2019)

A new system

The creation of a centralised and integrated crisis and emergency system centred around **the National Crisis Management Centre within the Government Office**

The development of a new institutional framework for sanctions policy consisting of (i) **the sanctions group in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and (ii) **the inter-institutional commission for the coordination of international sanctions policy** under this ministry

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW SYSTEM

Emergent reforms

- Organic, arising from the interaction of various actors
- Processes of adaptation to the crises
- Unpredictable

Programmatic reforms

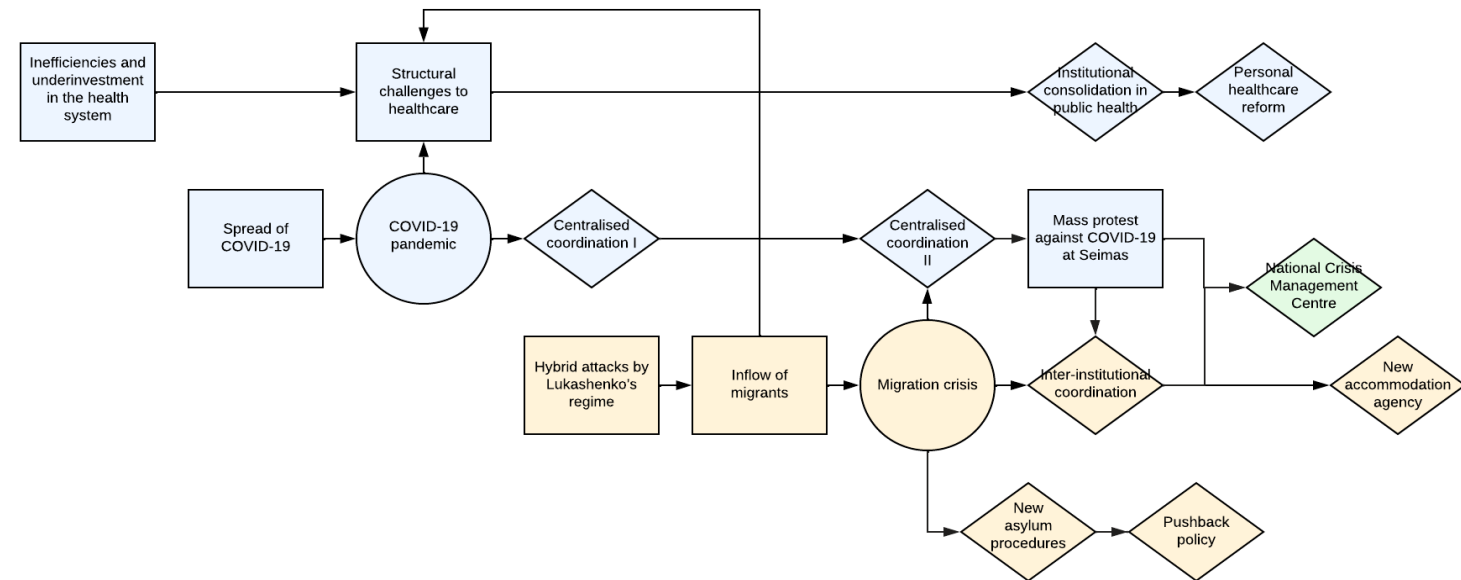
- Programmed by authoritative decision-makers and state institutions
- Deliberate policymaking/lawmaking processes
- Typically predictable

SPILOVER EFFECTS: NEW CRISIS COORDINATION IN 2021

The management of the COVID-19 crisis by the Governmental Emergency Situation Commission chaired by the Minister of the Interior from the end of 2020

The sudden influx of irregular migrants from Belarus in the middle of 2021

The transfer of the COVID-19 management to the Government Office because the Ministry of the Interior and its agencies struggled to cope with two major overlapping crises



THE CASE OF RIOTS

The Ministry of the Interior initially handled the migration crisis through its Operations Centre

On 10 August 2021:

- A riot broke out at the Rūdninkai migrant camp
- A mass protest against COVID-19 restrictions at the Lithuanian parliament escalated into riots

On 11 August 2021, the Minister of the Interior created a **Joint Situations Centre** because the escalating situation required *"a unified response from all state institutions, involving regular inter-institutional contacts"*



CONCLUSIONS: FROM NORMATIVE TO COERCIVE PRESSURES

The coordination of both individual crises in Lithuania initially relied on the existing institutional arrangements and professional routines following the logic of appropriateness. However, this approach failed to provide an effective response to the increasing complexity of the polycrisis in the country

When the impact of the individual crises intensified and/or they spilled into different domains, the Lithuanian authoritative decision-makers introduced more centralised and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, aligning with the logic of consequentiality stemming from coercive pressures

DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESILIENCE

Overall, the country's crisis management system was able to “**bounce forward**” (Manyena et al., 2011), with the potential of strengthening the overall resilience of the country's administration

While the National Crisis Management Centre has recently managed several minor events in the country, its capabilities to respond to more serious crises are **still to be tested**

Also, the system's centralised structure, with strong reliance on the Prime Minister's authority, may present **challenges in addressing future systemic threats such as climate change**, whose mitigation can be facilitated by polycentric governance structures (Boasson and Tatham, 2022)

RELEVANCE TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Lithuania's recent experience of going through several overlapping crises can offer valuable insights for other countries, in particular those from Central and Eastern Europe or Taiwan and South Korea, facing security threats from authoritarian countries

While the context of the polycrisis spurred the system-wide reforms of crisis management in Lithuania, its authorities placed a greater emphasis on centralised policy-making to address national security challenges stemming from the aggressive authoritarian regimes

However, the applicability of these research results to other contexts may vary:

- Despite high-complexity settings, pressures for reforms might not be as pronounced in countries facing weaker security challenges
- Similarly, the effectiveness of crisis coordination from the centre may be less apparent in more decentralised political systems where regional action may be more crucial



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Thank you for the attention!

Vitalis Nakrošis, professor
(vitalis.nakrosis@tspmi.vu.lt)

 [tspmi.vu.lt](https://twitter.com/tspmi.vu.lt)

 [/company/tspmi](https://www.linkedin.com/company/tspmi)

 [/tspmi](https://www.facebook.com/tspmi)

 [/vu_tspmi](https://www.instagram.com/vu_tspmi)

 [/MUTSPMI](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMUTSPMI)