**Evaluating the Partisan Effects of Pandemic Mitigation with Polling Place Data from the Republic of Georgia**

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**Abstract**: Elections require extensive resource mobilization, but how do officials adapt to threats and crises, and what are the consequences of those adaptations? This article analyzes the impact of extraordinary circumstances on the organization of elections in the Republic of Georgia, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Georgia, election officials designated special mobile polling places that would accommodate infected and quarantined voters. We find substantial variation in voter behavior in mobile polling places between different ballot types, and also between the first and second rounds of the elections. In the first round of the elections, the governing party (Georgian Dream) overperforms at special polling sites in comparison with standard polling places in most constituencies. However, this tendency changes in the second round of elections when Georgian Dream performs at approximately the same level in standard and mobile polling places. Our article investigates if these outcomes are due to selection effects, the spatial placement of special polling places, or manipulation. While we cannot definitively identify the source of the anomalies, our research emphasizes the importance of carefully managing and monitoring special accommodations for vulnerable voters.

**Keywords**: Election integrity, Republic of Georgia, Voter accommodations, COVID-19

**Introduction**

Elections require the largest, regular peacetime mobilization of citizens in a democracy. Political parties and candidates work to engage as many supporters as possible to vote, and public officials organize and train officials to tabulate the votes. This mobilization challenge is substantial in stable conditions, but how do officials adapt to threats and crises, and what are the consequences of those adaptations? This article analyzes the impact of extraordinary circumstances on the organization of elections in the Republic of Georgia, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As James et al. (2023) note, the pandemic raised several critical questions for election officials: what techniques are available to maintain the integrity of elections and personal safety; how well do different techniques work; and how do lessons from COVID-19 inform the future? Across the globe in 2020, election administrators developed protocols to sanitize stations, provide personal protective equipment to staff, maintain social distancing, ensure mask-wearing by voters, and otherwise engage in efforts to minimize risk. In the Republic of Georgia, officials designated special polling places that would accommodate only infected and quarantined voters. The standard practice for accommodating voters who cannot come to the polls on election day in Georgia is to provide access to a mobile ballot box, a small ballot box carried by officials to the residence of the voter. The special stations designated for COVID-19 patients expanded the use of mobile ballot boxes to a much larger scale than previously envisioned; these polling places did not invite voters into the facilities but instead dispatched mobile ballot boxes to gather votes from quarantined voters.

The results from these special polling places are puzzling, however. In the first round of the elections, the governing party (Georgian Dream) overperformed at special polling places compared to standard polling places. This tendency changed in the second round of elections when Georgian Dream performed at approximately the same level in standard and special polling places. Some research on special polling places has noted that partisanship, or fraud, can influence the process because voters in these circumstances are especially vulnerable to the preferences of state agents (Herron and Johnson 2008).

This paper investigates voting anomalies in special polling places in three sections. The first section outlines scholarship on the conduct of elections in crisis conditions and situates our analysis in that literature. The second section provides context for our case, the Republic of Georgia. The third section presents the data and analysis. We use unique datasets that compile information we acquired from the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) after the 2020 parliamentary elections. While our analysis cannot definitively identify the source of the anomalous outcomes, it suggests strongly that accommodations for vulnerable voters may have generated conditions for vote manipulation. Because elections will continue to take place during crisis situations, our findings provide a cautionary tale for administrators and election observers who must balance the need to accommodate ill, elderly, mobility-compromised, and other voters who cannot come to a standard polling place while also providing robust monitoring procedures to maintain election integrity even in difficult environments.

**Holding Elections During Crises**

Elections are a critical feature of democratic societies and they require large-scale organizational efforts. Polling place locations must be identified, set up, and secured for the duration of the elections. Voters must be notified of the location of polling places and any changes to traditional polling places must be carefully managed so that voters are aware of relocation. Thousands – and perhaps hundreds of thousands – of officials are deployed on election day to verify voters, manage polling places, and count ballots. In short, election administration under normal circumstances requires extensive logistical expertise.

To facilitate voter participation, election administrators must take several elements of polling place management into account. Research has demonstrated that many decisions administrators make can influence voter behavior, such as the distance to polling places (Haspel and Knotts 2005; James et al. 2023), changes to polling place locations (Brady and McNulty 2011; Amos, Smith, and Ste. Claire 2017), and the types of facilities used for voting (Rutchick 2010). Other potential concerns include the presence – or lack – of clear legal guidelines well as unilateral election administration decisions made by some authorities (James et al. 2023). In addition, variation in polling place quality (e.g., visibility, accessibility) affects voting behavior, with effects sometimes distributed unequally across the population (Barreto, Cohen-Marks, and Woods 2009).[[1]](#footnote-1) These challenges are substantial and confront election administrators even when elections are held under the best of circumstances. The difficulties of maintaining an efficient process with integrity are magnified when conditions are suboptimal.

In addition to work on how administrative decisions about polling places affect behavior under standard conditions, scholars have evaluated how crises influence outcomes. Natural and anthropogenic disasters, conflict, and terrorism create logistical and security challenges for elections. Although elections are sometimes delayed in response to extreme circumstances, administrators are often called upon to implement elections in challenging environments. Natural disasters can occur without much warning, requiring officials to create flexible conditions to maximize participation and safety (Stein 2015). Crises like conflict require different adaptations because voter and poll worker safety concerns also include the potential of violence (Herron, Thunberg, and Boyko 2015; Herron and Boyko 2016). Infectious diseases create yet another unusual set of circumstances for election administrators to address. Pandemics have affected the conduct of elections in the past (Marisam 2010), but the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented, large-scale challenges and elevated concerns about safety as densely packed polling places were considered a potential vector for transmission (Curiel and Clark 2021). Unexpected crises may require administrators to modify deadlines, polling place site selection, documentation requirements, or other aspects of the process that can affect the ability of voters to participate.

A general principle of election management is to create conditions to maximize the participation of valid voters and maintain the integrity of the process. To achieve these goals, administrators are tasked with establishing an election infrastructure that allows voters to find their polling places, efficiently participate in the process, and retain their confidence that votes are accurately tabulated. Crises undermine the achievement of all of these goals.

Crises can affect several components of the election process, as well as different outcomes. Much of the literature evaluates how crises affect participation in general (i.e., turnout). Indeed, crises create impediments for voters that are likely to reduce overall participation. Related to this question is the partisan effect of crises. Depending on the spatial distribution of crises and mitigation measures, as well as the spatial distribution of partisan preferences, specific crisis situations may benefit one party over another.

The COVID-19 pandemic, spreading to Georgia in early 2020, created a host of public health and governance problems. The pandemic affected every aspect of daily life, especially during the pre-vaccination period in 2020. Many democratic countries faced a vexing challenge: how to hold scheduled elections while protecting the health and safety of voters and poll workers? While some elections were postponed, many moved forward as scheduled.

Election officials made accommodations to protect voters and poll workers, but also move forward with national parliamentary elections scheduled for Fall 2020. In similar situations across the globe, administrators dealt with the pandemic by making elections more flexible through additional use of early voting or postal voting. In Georgia, election administrators addressed pandemic concerns by modifying the number and type of polling places available to voters.[[2]](#footnote-2) The following section provides an overview of the political context and structure of election administration in Georgia.

**Elections in the Republic of Georgia**

***Partisanship and Parties in Georgia***

Elections have been held in Georgia since it became independent in 1991 when the USSR collapsed. Initially, Georgia was a semi-presidential republic, transitioning to a parliamentary system after changes to the constitution in 2010 and its final presidential election in 2018 (Gachechiladze and Gogsadze 2021).

Before the Rose Revolution in 2003, and the January 2004 presidential election that transferred power to Mikheil Saakashvili, electoral outcomes were largely predetermined. Eduard Shevardnadze, president of Georgia between 1995 and 2003, and his political party secured their victories in elections that were influenced by fraud and manipulation. In the 2003 parliamentary elections, the government's party, the Union of Citizens of Georgia, announced itself to be the winner. Mikheil Saakashvili and his center-right political party – United National Movement (UNM) – challenged the results and declared the elections to be rigged. He and his supporters conducted a parallel vote count which revealed substantial discrepancies, and international observers also identified serious violations. Saakashvili's supporters started peaceful protests in front of the parliament building that escalated into what was later called the Rose Revolution.

After Saakashvili became president in January 2004, snap parliamentary elections were held in March 2004 and the UNM won decisively. Despite sweeping reforms of the police, a swift transfer of the country to a market economy, soaring foreign direct investment, and other institutional changes, Saakashvili's government became more autocratic in its methods (Lebanidze and Kakachia 2017). According to Ian Kelly, the former United States ambassador to Georgia, after the 2005 death of Saakashvili's prime minister Zurab Zhvania, his government increasingly gave in to autocratic inclinations (Kelly and Kramer 2021). Saakashvili's political rule was sustained through oppressing opposition leaders, controlling media ownership, and breaking up peaceful protests. A deteriorating media environment and coercive, semi-autocratic rule became even larger source of dissatisfaction for the public, reaching its nadir when Georgia engaged in the war with Russia in 2008.[[3]](#footnote-3) After Georgia's quick defeat, the Georgian Dream coalition accused Saakashvili of miscalculating the costs of responding to the provocations in Tskhinvali.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The continued presence of occupied territories and the consequences of the 2008 war with Russia affected the political landscape and party politics as well. A year before the scheduled 2012 parliamentary elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili, a businessmen and philanthropist, created the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition that successfully replaced the eight-year rule of UNM in the 2012 parliamentary elections. Just like its predecessor, GD started to consolidate political power into the hands of its government. Leading UNM figures were subjected to investigations, prosecutions, and in some cases imprisonment, including former interior minister Ivane (Vano) Merabishvili and Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava. Saakashvili was given two jail sentences in absentia (Kelly and Kramer 2021).

Throughout the 2010s there was strong political competition between GD and the UNM which together received approximately 95% of all votes in the 2012 parliamentary elections and 75% in 2016 and 2020 elections (Gachechiladze and Gogsadze, 2021).In 2012 and 2016, GD successfully campaigned by acting on negative public attitudes about UNM. The divide between the leaders of GD and the UNM has been increasing since 2012 and it culminated in the imprisonment of the former president, Mikheil Saakashvili, before the municipal elections in October 2021.

While political competition and passive conflict near the occupied regions remained as important challenges to conducting parliamentary elections in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic also directly affected the conduct of elections. The first case of the COVID-19 virus in Georgia appeared on February 27, 2020.[[5]](#footnote-5) By the end of March, cases spiked up to 110 and within several months, cases went up to several hundred. In the early stages of the pandemic, Georgia performed quite well in preventing widespread illness. It instituted several measures aimed at restricting the activities of businesses and other facilities that could facilitate the transmission of the virus (Buckley, Clem, and Herron 2022).

The pandemic boosted the approval of the Georgian government in significant ways.[[6]](#footnote-6) Between March and October 2020, COVID-19 cases were manageable throughout the country due to the swift and appropriate emergency management of the government (Buckley, Clem, and Herron 2022). But, some critics accused the government of using the anti-crisis budget for personal considerations.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), in multiple cases, the government utilized donations for COVID-19 relief for pre-election campaign finance. The report explains that in several municipalities (especially Lanchkhuti, Marneuli, Tsageri, Rustavi, and Adigeni), the Georgian Dream government increased funding for social welfare programs without any evidence that COVID-related special financial support was needed.

As the elections approached in late October, pandemic-related regulations limited mass gatherings (Gogsadze and Gachechiladze 2021), affecting the campaigns. Extraordinary conditions related to the pandemic, such as travel restrictions, also limited oversight, including the deployment of observations missions.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Election administration met all legal deadlines and generally managed technical aspects of the elections efficiently, amid adjustments in response to the pandemic (OSCE Observation Mission). The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and District Electoral Commissions (DECs) held regular sessions open to representatives of electoral subjects, observers and the media. Decrees, ordinances, decisions on complaints and session minutes of the CEC and DECs were publicly available online, contributing to transparency of the process. According to the OSCE observation team, the CEC regularly consulted civil society and party representatives. The international observers of the parliamentary elections positively assessed the technical aspects of election administration, but the dominance of the ruling party in the election commissions, excessive negative campaigning, and a highly polarized media negatively affected the perception of their impartiality and independence.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Georgia uses a mixed-member majoritarian electoral system to select its 150 members of parliament: 120 are elected through party-list proportional representation and 30 members are elected in single-seat constituencies using majority-runoff. The 2020 elections thus featured two rounds of competition held on October 31and November 21, 2020. In the second round of the elections, only constituencies in which the top-ranking candidate earned less than 50% of the vote in the first round held competitions. Georgian Dream won the majority of the 150 seats in parliament for the third time in a row. The United National Movement – United Opposition Strength received the second largest number of seats. In total, Georgian Dream and the political coalition Power is in Unity received 90 and 36 seats, respectively. European Georgia under Davit Bakradze received 5 seats and the rest of the political parties received fewer than 5 seats.

In the first round of elections, Georgian Dream secured 48.22% of votes in the proportional representation component and 50% of the seats (60 seats). In the constituency races, GD won 13 seats out of 30. The top-performing candidates in seventeen constituencies did not receive 50% + 1 of the vote, so a second round of elections was held. Shortly after preliminary results of the first round were announced, the eight opposition parties that surpassed the parliamentary threshold rejected the election results, alleging widespread electoral fraud. They discouraged their voters from participating in the second round, depressing turnout. GD won all 17 of the second-round district seats. Even though international observation groups did not provide sufficient evidence to invalidate the elections results, many opposition parties refused to participate in the business of parliament for approximately six months.[[10]](#footnote-10)

***Election Administration in Georgia***

Georgia's election administration is divided into three hierarchical levels: the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), District Electoral Commissions (DECs), and Precinct Electoral Commissions (PECs). In the 2020 parliamentary elections, Georgia had 73 DECs with 30 constituencies and 3,657 PECs. Due to the extraordinary circumstances related to the pandemic, the Central Electoral Commission created 134 special mobile polling stations to enable voting for COVID-infected voters.

District and precinct commissions consist of 12 members: six non-partisan members and six members appointed by political parties. According to the previous edition of the Election Code, DECs, like the CEC, were composed of 12 members, with the CEC appointing six professional members and political parties appointing six members. The CEC appointed the members by a majority vote, whereas political parties were allocated members by a rule similar to their nomination of CEC members, proportionally to election results. In practice, the procedure meant that the ruling party had control of regional commissions.[[11]](#footnote-11)

DECs appoint five permanent non-partisan members on PECs;[[12]](#footnote-12) the other seven members (including one additional non-partisan member) are appointed by parties for the election period no later than 53 days before election day. According to the OSCE's election report, women comprised 66% of DEC members and over 74% of PEC members; as well as 60% of DEC chairpersons and over 65% of PEC chairpersons.[[13]](#footnote-13) While most PEC chairs were non-partisan members, all 455 chairpersons elected from among party-nominated members represented GD.[[14]](#footnote-14) GD was criticized for dominating the election commissions as it negatively affected the perception of their impartiality and independence of the elections, especially at the precinct level.

***Accommodations for COVID-infected Voters***

Maintaining public health, while upholding the rights of citizens to vote, was challenging for every government with scheduled elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Georgian policymakers, including the CEC, were not immune from these challenges. They adopted several measures to safeguard public health, including requirements that voters wear masks; that poll workers, observers, party proxies and media representatives wear personal protective equipment and have temperature checks upon entering polling stations; and that precincts be regularly disinfected.[[15]](#footnote-15) A particularly challenging and controversial aspect of election administration was the procedure for infected voters who were either self-isolating or stationed in specially designed hospitals assigned for COVID-19 patients.

On August 23, 2020, the CEC stated that in collaboration with other institutions and political parties, it would take necessary measures to fight the pandemic's impact on conducting the elections in a safe environment. These decisions also defined the safest ways of receiving voters in the polling stations, exiting from the polling stations, conducting temperature checks, and other safety measures. According to the CEC, it also changed the locations of around 150 polling stations to meet the standards of conducting safe elections during the pandemic. Up to 500 polling stations conducted voting in more spacious locations to secure social distancing between the voters and the PEC members, but the physical addresses of the PECs did not always change.

Some CEC resolutions and decrees are especially notable. With resolutions 43/2020 and 45/2020, the CEC defined the conditions of participation in elections for individuals confined in penitentiaries, COVID-infected voters, and people confined to hospitals for treatment.[[16]](#footnote-16) On August 31, 2020, the CEC defined the sanitary and hygiene norms with Decree 51.[[17]](#footnote-17) On October 19, 2020, the CEC issued Decree 45 which determined the rules of participation in elections for voters in self-isolation and stationary treatment establishments.[[18]](#footnote-18) According to this new regulation, issued 12 days before the elections were held, COVID-infected voters should register for mobile ballot voting between October 24 and October 27. Voters on special voting lists would be served by mobile voting procedures designed to accommodate infected voters.

The CEC announced that 9,940 voters contacted their office to register for special mobile voting, declaring themselves infected with COVID-19. Upon cross-checking the alleged quarantined patients in the official database of the infected patients, the CEC registered 3,695 applicants out of 9,940. According to the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) observation mission, 1,917 additional individuals were included on mobile ballot voting lists, particularly members of the "special groups" that administered the mobile balloting, election observers, and media representatives. According to our calculations from data provided by the CEC, 11,051 voters cast ballots in these special polling places out of 1,977,583 total votes (or 0.6% of the overall vote).[[19]](#footnote-19)

Some politicians and civil society representatives questioned the CEC's decision to use mobile ballot boxes for COVID-19 patients instead of setting up special precincts in hospitals and quarantine zones for the infected voters.[[20]](#footnote-20) They expressed strong concern that the process would be vulnerable to fraud and manipulation. In total, the CEC created 134 special PECs that allowed infected voters – only those registered in the special database of infected patients – to cast their votes exclusively through a mobile box procedure.[[21]](#footnote-21)

***Election Day in Special Polling Places***

According to the Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms, and Trainings, election administrators were trained in accordance with all recommended safety measures.[[22]](#footnote-22) The Center also emphasized that the CEC organized rapid COVID-19 tests and vaccination of commission members. According to the OSCE observation mission, the administrators met all legal deadlines and generally managed technical aspects of the elections efficiently, amid adjustments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[[23]](#footnote-23) Despite these measures, on election day, many polling places had periods of time with long lines, elevating the chances for exposure (Gilbreath and Silagadze 2021).

According to local observation groups, voting was generally conducted without major violations. However, observer groups highlighted abnormalities related to vote confidentiality and the results protocols, as well as several procedural concerns, including voter identification, application of COVID-19-related measures, inking procedures, and sharing roles among precinct election commission members. Election day was flawed by obstruction of the work of journalists and observers, as well as allegations of vote buying and vote rigging.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The number of the international observation groups and civil society representatives was limited due to the pandemic. Some non-governmental organizations conducted their analysis for elections virtually.[[25]](#footnote-25) Others deployed smaller missions than in past elections.[[26]](#footnote-26) Observation teams on the ground included the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), International Society for Fair and Democratic Elections (ISFED), Transparency International – Georgia, Multilingual Georgia, and the Human Rights Center.[[27]](#footnote-27) These observation missions focused their teams on monitoring standard polling stations; they had limited or no observation team members monitor groups that carried mobile ballots from the special polling stations to infected voters.

We contacted ISFED and Transparency International to further inquire about their observations of mobile ballot voting. Both organizations informed us that due to the special epidemiological situations their staff was limited, and they did not directly observe mobile ballot box voting procedures for quarantined voters. Despite the limitation of observation reports on mobile ballot voting, we extracted available information on this matter from credible observation missions.

***Election Results and Post-election Complaints***

By November, 1,546 complaints were filed with the CEC. The most frequent reasons included violations of voting procedures (42 cases); violations of mobile voting procedures (39 cases); violations of procedures regarding the distribution of assignments among PEC members (37 cases); improper presentation of tasks of the commission members (34 cases); violations of observer teams' rights (31 cases); violations of the secrecy of the ballot (29 cases); violations of inking procedures (23 cases); and violations of procedures regarding voter lists (13 cases). In 341 cases, disciplinary action against a commission member was the requested remedy. There were 66 complaints requesting precinct results be annulled and 27 complaints requesting reports on administrative violations.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In sum, Georgia's elections are conducted in a highly contested environment, with two main political party competitors. Its three-tiered administration manages elections, but has faced challenges caused by instability around two occupied territories and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following sections, we assess how election administrators adapted to these challenges and the consequences of these adaptations.

**Identifying the Puzzle: Support for the Ruling Party in Mobile Polling Places**

As we noted above, the leading political party in contemporary Georgian politics is Georgian Dream and the primary opposition party is the United National Movement (UNM).[[29]](#footnote-29) Much of our analysis emphasizes these two political parties.

Figure 1 displays the mean proportion of the PEC-level party-list vote for GD aggregated at the level of the 30 constituencies in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections. For 2020, results are differentiated by standard PECs and special mobile PECs. The 2016 elections are represented by green markers, while the 2020 elections are represented by blue markers (standard PECs) and red markers (mobile PECs). While the performance of GD varies between 2016 and 2020, differences in performance at the district level are generally not large.

However, in most districts, GD's performance in mobile polling places substantially exceeds its performance in standard polling places.[[30]](#footnote-30) Why do we observe these substantial discrepancies? In the remainder of the analysis, we assess three potential explanations:

* Partisan differences in attitudes and behaviors about the pandemic resulted in disproportionately high infection rates among GD supporters;
* Mobile polling places were disproportionately located in neighborhoods where GD enjoyed higher support in the population;
* The process of voting at mobile polling places differed from standard polling places, exerting explicit or implicit pressure on voters to support GD.

Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generated

**Figure 1: Georgian Dream Performance in the PR Component by DEC**

***Description of the Data***

We use two data sources for our analysis: data about election administration and voting outcomes in the first and second round of the elections, and a public opinion survey conducted in Georgia during 2020.

*Election Results Data*

Our analysis primarily uses data from Georgia's Central Electoral Commission. We acquired polling place-level data from the CEC's website (<https://www.cesko.ge>) and through direct contact with officials via email. The data include full polling place level results for elections in 2016, 2018, and 2020, the addresses of all polling places, and the personnel lists for each polling place. Results data for each round of the elections include the number of registered voters; mobile voters; votes cast at noon, 5pm, and at the closing of the polls; ballots received, invalid ballots;[[31]](#footnote-31) and votes for each candidate or party. Address data include the district and polling place numbers, along with a description of the street address and facility. Personnel data include the district and polling place numbers, along with the names of poll workers, their positions, and source of nomination.

Using the addresses provided by the CEC, we geolocated the polling places. Some polling stations located in rural areas with small populations could not be precisely identified in open-source maps (e.g., Google Maps). In circumstances where we could not locate the address of the specific facility where voting was taking pace, we assigned geocodes based on our best estimates of the precinct locations. In other cases, we faced challenges with identifying locations of polling stations located on private property or other establishments in small rural areas. In these situations, we determined the best approximate geolocations. To create our combined dataset across all three elections, we identified polling places that moved locations through geolocation data, only classifying those that moved beyond 100 feet as changes.

We also geolocated the special polling places identified for COVID-infected patients that were quarantining in hospitals or self-isolating. According to Provision 2 of Resolution 45/2020, at least one polling station was created in each municipality to enable COVID-infected patients vote; at least 10 polling stations were created in Tbilisi for the same purpose. In these new polling stations, the CEC created special groups of at least twelve officers who were responsible for administering mobile ballot boxes. The head of the special group as well as other members of the group were responsible for allocating special numbers to mobile ballot boxes and locking them before transporting them to infected voters. Groups of two special officers transported the mobile ballots to the voters. Observers from local, international and media were allowed to attend the voting procedure. Vote-counting started no earlier than 8 pm, after all mobile ballots returned to the polling stations.

Table 1 reports the descriptive data for the polling places. The CEC designated 3,630 polling places in 2016. The net number of PECs dropped in 2018 to 3,615, with 47 PECs from the previous election closed and 32 new PECs opened. The number of PECs climbed substantially in 2020, to 3,795 with 100 PECs closed, 280 opened, and 134 mobile PECs established. The number of voters and polling places in Round 2 of 2020 is substantially smaller than Round 1 because balloting only took place in seventeen of thirty constituencies.

**Table 1: Descriptive Data for Georgia's PECs, 2016-2020**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 (Round 1) | 2020 (Round 2) |
| Registered Voters | 3,512,805 | 3,495,212 | 3,511,853 | 2,140,221 |
| Registered Voters per PEC (Mean) | 967.7 | 966.9 | 925.6 | 1,118 |
| Number of PECs | 3,630 | 3,615 | 3,795 | 2, 003 |
| Number of PECs Closed | -- | 47 | 100 | - |
| Number of PECs Opened | -- | 32 | 280 | 280 |
| Number of Mobile PECs | -- | -- | 134 | 89 |

*Survey Data*

We evaluate our main research questions about the effects of mobile polling places using election data. To address alternate explanations, however, we use public opinion data from a survey conducted in spring 2020. We worked in cooperation with the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in Tbilisi, Georgia to develop and field a survey about public attitudes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this survey, we asked respondents to describe the measures that they have taken to prevent disease spread and whether or not they subscribe to any conspiracy theories related to the pandemic. We also asked respondents about their partisan preferences. The survey data thus permit us to evaluate if Georgian Dream supporters would be more or less likely to engage in behaviors that could place them in quarantine. In other words, they allow us to answer whether or not our findings are due to selection effects.

**Analysis**

Our primary expectation is that accommodations for pandemic voters should not be associated with partisan effects. In general, we should expect that while the infected and quarantined may disproportionately represent individuals who work in higher-risk professions (e.g., first responders),[[32]](#footnote-32) the ranks of the quarantined should not be systematically associated with partisan affiliation. We analyze the results of the party-list vote and single-seat districts in round one of the elections and the results of 17 single-seat districts in round two.

***Differential Partisan Effects Between Standard and Mobile PECs***

In some countries, pandemic responses were politicized. For example, in the United States, supporters of the Republican Party were less likely to follow the medical community's recommendations (Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky 2021). If a similar dynamic were at play in Georgia, we might find that partisanship is associated with outcomes due to elevated hospitalizations of ruling party supporters. We do not have information about the stated preferences of COVID-19 patients in Georgia at the time of the election, but we have a reasonable proxy: a nationally-representative survey that asked respondents about their attitudes and behaviors related to the pandemic. The CRRC conducted our survey (N=1,063) by phone from April 24-28, 2020.[[33]](#footnote-33) The questionnaire collected basic demographic data, partisan preferences, and asked respondents about their attitudes related to the pandemic.

In the survey, we asked respondents about their perspectives on the pandemic's effects, behaviors they engaged in to protect themselves from the risk of infection, and their attitudes about government responses. We also asked respondents to identify the party they felt closest to. Among our respondents, 47% identified GD as their preferred party. This level of support exceeds other pre-election polls held in February,[[34]](#footnote-34) but the party's popularity varied in the months leading up to the election and our question differed from the standard one in pre-election polls which asks respondent what party they would vote for in the election. However, it is possible that our sample over-represents supporters of the pro-regime party. Our main question here is: do GD supporters differ in ways that might place them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and being in quarantine at the time of the election?

The first issue to explore is knowledge about the pandemic, as less attentive individuals might have engaged in riskier behaviors. We asked respondents "how closely have you been following news about the outbreak of the coronavirus strain known as COVID-19?" GD supporters were more likely than supporters of other parties to be attentive to COVID-19 news (see the appendix for full results). This response suggests that GD supporters should not engage in riskier behaviors because they lack information about the pandemic.

While the pandemic was in its infancy, public health officials circulated many recommendations about how to avoid illness. We asked respondents a battery of questions related to these issues. Our question asked: "Which of the following actions can decrease the likelihood an individual will contract COVID-19?" Supporters of GD were no different from other respondents in assessing risk and believed that the following behaviors limited risk of infection: covering a cough, not touching their face, cleaning surfaces, and isolating when sick. They were more likely than supporters of other parties to believe that washing hands and avoiding sick people would reduce their risks of contracting COVID-19. GD supporters reported engaging in behaviors that should not increase their risks of falling ill, relative to supporters of other parties.[[35]](#footnote-35) Moreover, the proportion of respondents who identified these safety measures positively was over 90%. GD supporters, like Georgians in general, understood appropriate precautions.

We also asked respondents about misinformation related to the pandemic, notably whether or not drinking vodka or going to a sauna could prevent the disease. Advice to engage in these prophylactic practices circulated in the region, promoted by prominent officials.[[36]](#footnote-36) GD supporters were less likely than supporters of different parties to believe that drinking vodka would ward off the disease, and no different from the rest of the public in believing that a sauna was a potential protective measure.[[37]](#footnote-37) They also did not differ from supporters of other parties regarding their beliefs that the disease was actually a US or Chinese manufactured bioweapon.

GD supporters were consistently positive about government responses to the pandemic, and more positive than supporters of other parties. They were more likely to indicate that they were satisfied with the national-level response, local-level response, and work of the Ministry of Health. They were also less likely to believe that their incomes would be negatively affected by the disease.

In short, a few months before the election, there was no evidence to suggest that GD supporters would disproportionately engage in risky behaviors that might expose them to COVID-19. They were more likely than supporters of other parties to pay attention to news about the pandemic, equally or more likely to engage in behaviors that mitigate the risk of contracting the disease, and less likely to believe in false narratives about how to protect themselves from infection. They did not anticipate negative economic effects which could induce riskier behaviors. They also expressed faith in government policies which at the time included significant risk mitigation policies. These survey data suggest that there is no reason to believe that GD supporters would be disproportionately represented among those contracting COVID-19.

***Neighborhood Effects and GD Support in Mobile PECs***

We have established that the disproportionate support GD received in mobile polling places is not likely due to individual-level behaviors associated with disease avoidance. We did not find evidence that GD supporters would be more likely than supporters of other parties to risk disease exposure and consequently experience quarantine at the time of the election. In other words, the disease itself should not be "sorting" GD supporters into mobile polling places.

Map

Description automatically generated

**Figure 2: Results in Mobile PECs, Georgia's 2020 Parliamentary Elections**

However, while mobile polling places were designed to serve large areas, they were placed in specific locations. Our initial comparison of GD performance to that of other parties was conducted at the district level. Perhaps officials opened special polling places in neighborhoods that were GD strongholds. This could result in a higher proportion of voters using special polling places who were supporters of GD. Alternatively, voters could be influenced directly or indirectly by their neighborhood's partisan lean.[[38]](#footnote-38) Our comparison of mobile and standard polling places at the district level may mask differences at lower levels of aggregation; we may not be measuring neighborhoods correctly.

Figure 2 is a map of all mobile PECs with the markers reflecting the results of our tests. We geolocated each mobile polling place, and calculated three distances (a radius of 10km, 5km, and 3km) to generate "neighborhoods." We conducted difference-of-means tests in these spatial areas to evaluate if the performance of GD in COVID-19 mobile polling places differed from the standard polling places in the rest of the "neighborhood." The map shows the results of those tests. Green markers denote polling places where GD performed better in mobile PECs than in standard; purple markers denote outcomes that could not be differentiated; red markers denote outcomes where GD performed worse in mobile PECs than in standard ones. Yellow markers identify PECs where the results vary by the definition of the neighborhood. For example, GD may perform better in mobile PECs than in standard ones when the neighborhood is defined as a 10km or 5km radius, but worse in mobile PECs when the neighborhood is defined as a 3km radius.[[39]](#footnote-39) We also denoted PECs with a circle if there were no analytical issues. PECs using a triangle had some issues (primarily small sample sizes).[[40]](#footnote-40)

If GD's performance in special polling places is due to neighborhood effects, we should see predominantly purple markers. While some purple markers are present on the map, showing no differences between the special polling places and the standard polling places nearby, we predominantly see evidence of inflated GD performance (green). While some areas of the country, notably the western regions, seem to show less inflated GD performance than others, GD generally garners a higher proportion of the vote in special polling places than in standard ones. This outcome suggests that the placement of special polling places in particular locations does not explain away the discrepancies.

***Processes in Mobile PECs***

*Evaluating PEC Personnel Effects on Outcomes*

In principle, election administrators are supposed to neutrally apply the rules and count ballots to yield a result that matches the expressed preferences of citizens. Some research on election administration has found that the partisan composition of election commissions can affect outcomes (Boyko and Herron 2015; Herron 2020). While the substantive impact on election results was relatively small, polling places managed by officials associated with certain parties seemed to produce systematic benefits for their parties in the returns. How could this occur? Polling place officials assist voters, make decisions about questionable ballots, and otherwise influence the environment in which votes are cast and counted. If partisan actors adjust the process to benefit their preferred party – even marginally or within the bounds of the law – the outcomes could reflect that influence.

**Table 2: PEC Personnel by Party and Appointment**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Standard PEC Members** | | | | | | | |  |
|  | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **Total** |
| **Georgian Dream** |  | 1 | 34 | 3,626 |  |  |  |  | 3,661 |
| **UNM** | 8 | 3,653 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3,661 |
| **European Georgia** | 9 | 3,652 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3,661 |
| **Alliance of Patriots** | 4 | 3,657 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3,661 |
| **DEC** | 3 |  |  | 5 | 8 | 81 | 3,570 | 1 | 3,661 |
| **CEC** | 3,658 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 |  | 3,661 |
|  | **Number of Mobile PEC Members** | | | | | | | |  |
|  | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **Total** |
| **Georgian Dream** |  | 2 | 5 | 127 |  |  |  |  | 134 |
| **UNM** | 7 | 127 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 134 |
| **European Georgia** | 29 | 105 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 134 |
| **Alliance of Patriots** | 64 | 70 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 134 |
| **DEC** | 120 | 7 |  |  |  |  | 7 |  | 134 |
| **CEC** | 7 |  | 2 | 3 | 3 | 33 | 86 |  | 134 |

We investigated the partisan distribution of poll workers across all PECs in our study. Table 2 shows the distribution of partisan and ostensibly non-partisan officials for standard and mobile polling places, respectively. As the table shows, there was limited variation in the distribution of officials by appointment type.

We noted above that the law prescribes a quota for four parties as well as officials appointed by election administrators. Most polling places adhered to these requirements. Georgian Dream failed to reach its quota in 35 standard polling places and seven mobile polling places. Other parties also experienced deviations from the formula: UNM was absent in eight standard PECs and seven mobile; European Georgia in nine standard and 29 mobile; and the Alliance of Patriots in four standard and 64 mobile. Party representation was more likely to stray from expectations in mobile PECs, especially for European Georgia and the Alliance of Patriots.

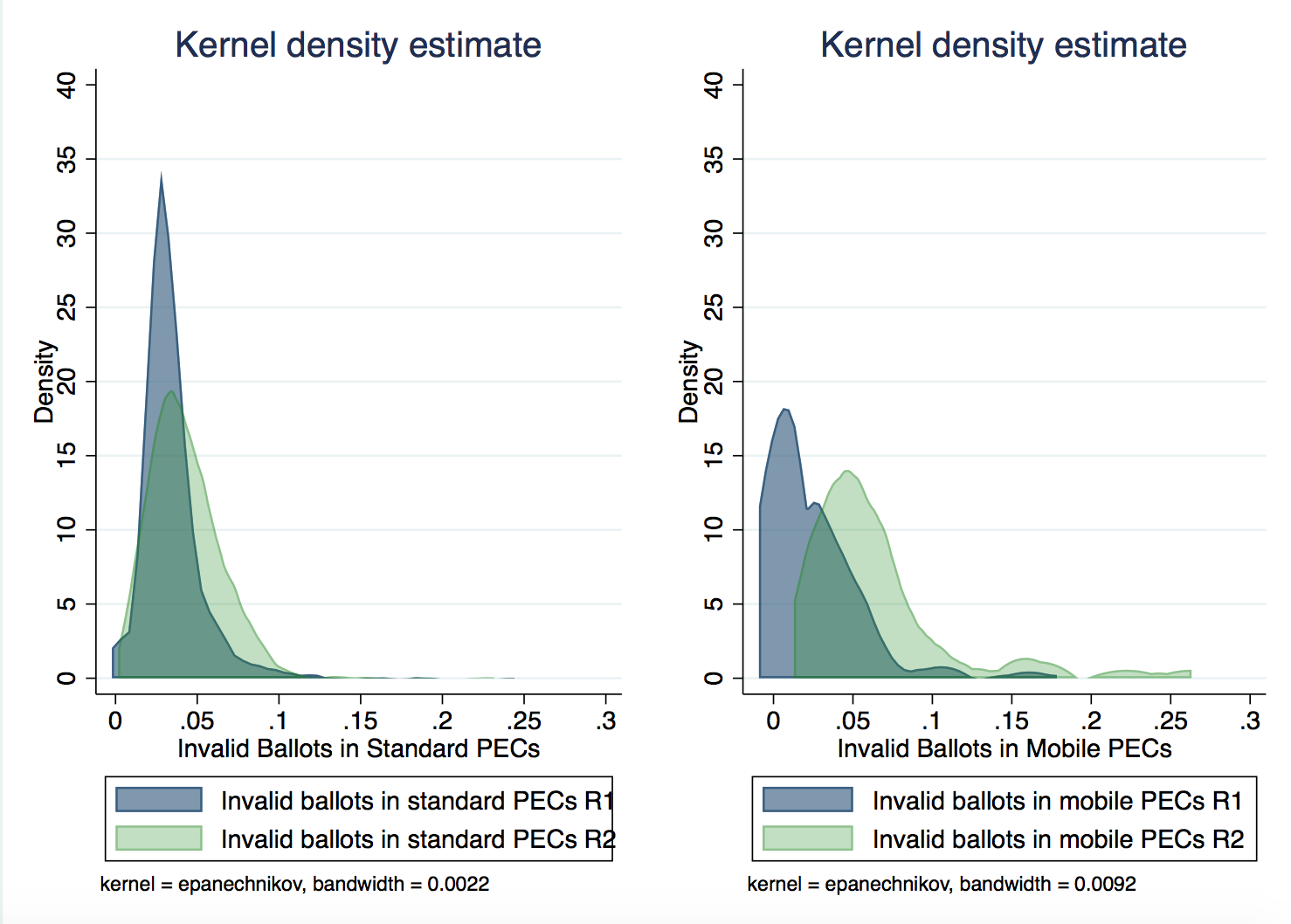
Appointed positions from the DEC and CEC also varied. The DEC typically appointed its six representatives, but appointed fewer than six in 94 standard PECs and one extra in a single PEC. The DEC also appointed members in fourteen mobile PECs. Similarly, the CEC provided the requisite staffing in 86 mobile PECs, and fewer than six members in 41 mobile PECs. It provided no staff in seven mobile PECs. While we do not know the specific reasons for some polling stations to diverge from these allocations, late changes in personnel due to illness or other extenuating circumstances is a common phenomenon (Boyko, Herron, and Sverdan 2014).

Research that has directly connected the partisanship of poll workers to variation in outcomes has generally focused on leadership positions. Because the officers in PECs (chair, deputy chair, and secretary) wield considerable agenda setting power, control of these specific positions could provide a political party with localized advantages that may be reflected in the results (Boyko and Herron 2015; Herron, Boyko, and Thunberg 2017; Herron 2020; Boyko 2022). In Georgia, however, we once again witness limited variation: the chairs of 3,643 of the 3,795 PECs were affiliated with Georgian Dream (440) or DEC appointments (3,203), with most of the remainder in mobile PECs chaired by CEC appointees.

The lack of variation in appointments makes it difficult to control for this feature in an empirical analysis. Moreover, because CEC personnel are almost exclusively found in mobile polling places, any control variable for this appointment type would be virtually indistinguishable from a variable differentiating mobile and standard polling places. In our case, the data suggest that the limited variation in the partisan composition of polling place commissions is unlikely to explain why GD performed better in mobile polling places.

***Investigating Evidence of Improper Influence***

The final possibility is that voters in mobile polling places were influenced, or that the results in these polling places were otherwise tampered with in the administrative process. Election fraud is notoriously difficult to systematically detect. While election forensics have been used widely to identify anomalies that could be attributed to fraud, these tests may not yield direct evidence that fraud has been perpetrated. Evidence through eyewitness accounts, for example, is challenging to assemble especially during the pandemic when election observers were fewer in number. Moreover, observers did not monitor the special mobile polling places in Georgia's 2020 election.



**Figure 3: Invalid Ballots**

Despite these challenges, we can evaluate the data to check for anomalous results.[[41]](#footnote-41) Figure 3 provides an initial exploration of the data to uncover how voting was conducted in special polling places. The figure displays the distribution of invalid ballots; ballots that were not counted for any party because they did not comply with the law. Invalid ballots can take many forms: voters can overvote by checking more than one box, undervote by checking no boxes, or otherwise violate rules of ballot completion. For example, one of the authors has served as an international election observer and has regularly witnessed ballots invalidated because voters wrote a personal message on their ballot.[[42]](#footnote-42) In other words, ballots are sometimes invalidated because voters make mistakes and sometimes because voters intentionally invalidate them.

The figure shows that ballot invalidation rates in standard polling places peaked between 3-5% of the vote in both rounds of voting although the variation was greater in the second round. By contrast, invalidation rates in mobile polling places were much lower in the first round, on average, than in standard polling places in either round or mobile polling places in the second round.

Invalidation rates provide some insights into the process occurring in a polling place. We would expect ballot invalidation rates to decline when certain forms of fraud are prevalent, notably ballot box stuffing. If voters or officials are engaged in stuffing ballot boxes, they artificially inflate the proportion of votes cast for their preferred party and simultaneously deflate the proportion of invalid ballots. Thus, low invalidation rates are often perceived as an anomaly associated with fraud.

Low invalidation rates could be produced by other means as well. In polling places where voters have greater access to election administration personnel, they may be more likely to ask questions if they are confused with some aspect of ballot completion and thus be less likely to make errors leading to invalidation. Mobile polling places were designed to provide closer contact, with officials bringing ballot boxes to the homes and bedsides of COVID-19 patients. While officials might be less likely to come into close contact out of fear of contracting the disease, voters might have a greater opportunity to engage with officials and reduce the likelihood that they make mistakes.

We should see these effects in both rounds of competition, however, as there is no clear reason for voters to have been more competent in filling out their ballots in the first round in special polling places, but in no other circumstances. The lack of consistency suggests that some kind of anomalous behavior resulted in the lower invalidation rates for the first round. Unfortunately, we cannot fully adjudicate between these two explanations. We can conclude that some aspect of the process differed in the mobile polling places in the first and second round of the elections. But we cannot definitively ascribe these differences to fraud. Does any other evidence point to fraud taking place in the polling stations?

Efforts to detect election fraud have engaged with a wide range of data, including surveys, ethnographies, legal documents, media coverage, and election monitoring reports produced by domestic and international actors (Lehoucq 2003). Over the last two decades, scholars have increasingly investigated election data for evidence of anomalies most plausibly explained by fraud. Some of these efforts have imported techniques from other fields to assess the distribution of digits (Nigrini 2006; Mebane 2006; Beber and Scacco 2012), while others have evaluated turnout, ballot invalidation, or special precincts (Herron and Johnson 2008; Myagkov, Ordeshook, and Shakin 2009). We use some of these techniques to further interrogate the data here and in the Appendix.

Researchers have used turnout data to investigate potential fraud. Unusually high levels of turnout – especially when they are associated with strong results for a particular party or candidate – may indicate that fraud is present. Turnout data are especially concerning when they reveal unusually high numbers of polling places with 100%, or near 100%, participation. In most standard polling places, especially in countries without compulsory voting, some voters will abstain from participation. Figure 4 shows turnout in both rounds for standard polling places and for mobile polling places. The distribution of turnout in standard polling places during the first round approximates a normal distribution and there are no unusual values at high levels of turnout. The second-round distribution is skewed right, with a substantially lower mean. Given that the second-round competition involved a subset of districts and was not accompanied by the party list ballot, and the opposition instructed supporters to boycott, lower levels of participation are not surprising.

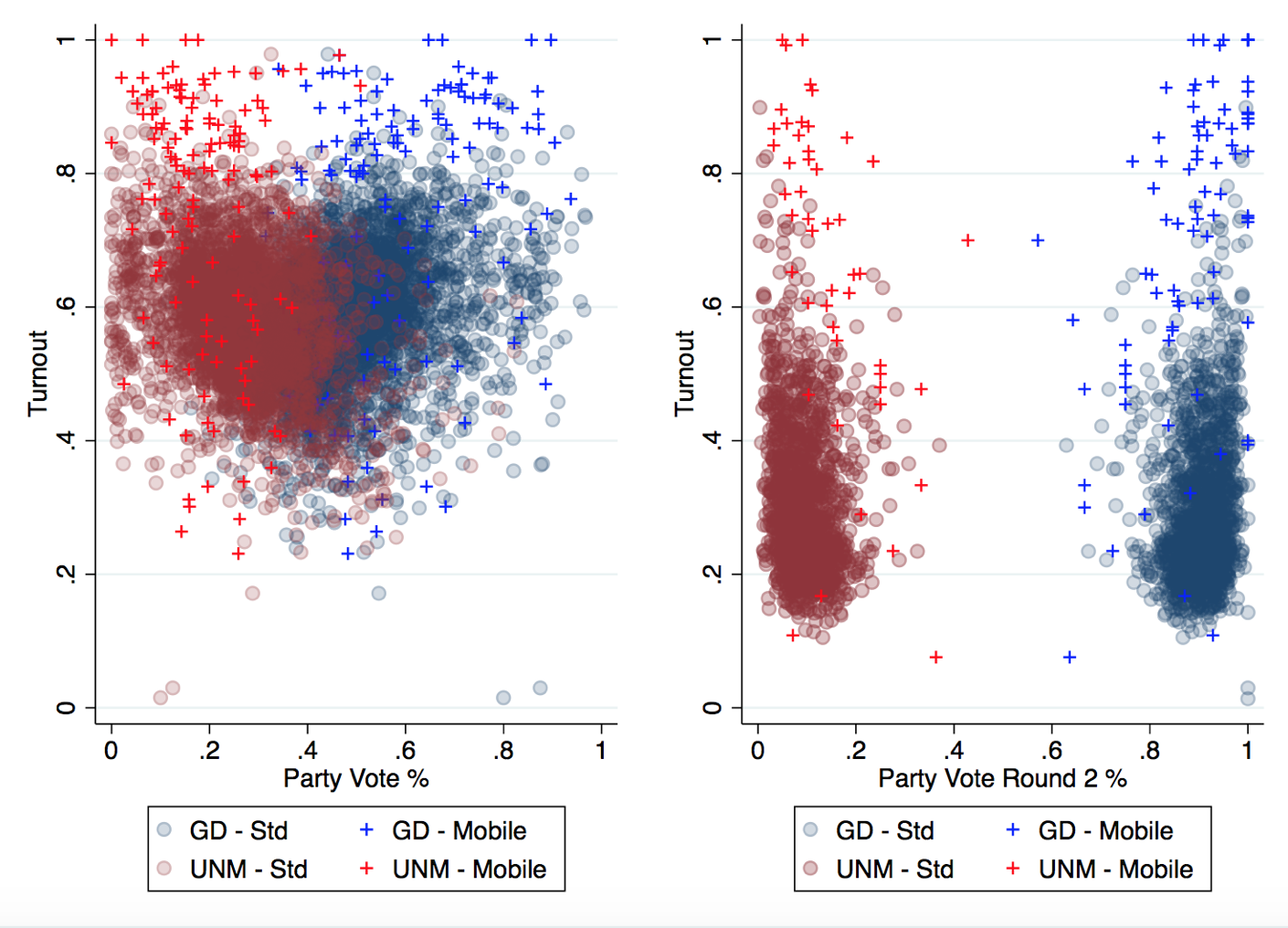
Chart

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**Figure 4: Turnout by PEC for Different Modalities**

By contrast, mobile polling places show higher levels of turnout. In many respects, this outcome is not surprising as the circumstances leading voters to cast votes in these places are also consistent with higher levels of turnout. That is, voters who are ill or quarantined request to vote in their homes. This process implies that voters would be less likely to abstain from voting than they might be if they were simply voting by a standard method. The distribution of turnout differs between rounds, however. In the second round, the mean is lower and the distribution is flatter. In short, while there are differences between the first and second rounds in terms of turnout, the data do not reveal unexpected anomalies likely attributable to fraud.

Figure 5 combines turnout data with party performance and does not reveal suspicious patterns in Round 1. If high turnout were also associated with high vote proportions for one party (and low vote proportions for its opponent), it might suggest ballot box stuffing, ballot invalidation, or another method of fraud. This outcome, observed in past research by the authors elsewhere, has been a notable indicator of systematic fraud. While some mobile polling places produce strong results for GD, and poor results for UMD, we do not observe a cluster of polling places with high turnout and high pro-regime outcomes in the first round. By contrast, in the second round, we observe a few mobile polling places at high levels of turnout with most votes cast for the ruling party. The high levels of support for GD in Round 2, noted by results in the top right portion of the figure, could also be attributed to the opposition voter boycott. The appendix includes additional analysis that was omitted due to space limitations. That analysis similarly does not provide definitive evidence of malfeasance on behalf of the ruling party.



**Figure 5: Turnout and Party Vote**

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conduct of elections in the Republic of Georgia. In order to insulate voters from the highly contagious virus before vaccines were invented, the Georgian Central Electoral Commission established special polling places to allow infected voters to cast votes where they were in quarantine. As the results of the analysis show, the ruling Georgian Dream party performed significantly better in a majority of these special mobile polling stations than it did in regular polling stations in the first round. Our analysis investigated the puzzle emanating from the differences in its performance across ballots and in different voting rounds.

We ruled out several possible explanations for its elevated outcomes in the Round 1 vote. As our analysis established, the disproportionate support received by GD in mobile polling places is not likely due to individual-level behaviors associated with the disease. We did not find evidence that GD supporters would be more likely than supporters of other parties to vote at regular polling stations and expose themselves to the threat of the COVID-19. We also could not find evidence that the spatial location of special polling places had an impact of the extraordinary support for GD.

While we do not find an evidence of systematic manipulation by the ruling party, there are potential explanations for GD's performance among infected voters. One possibility is that voters located in the special polling places associated their medical care with the ruling party. The provision of free medical help could have made them more disposed to have a temporary positive feeling towards the GD relative to other voters. It is also possible that subtle messaging – or perhaps even more direct coercion[[43]](#footnote-43) – could have motivated voters to support the ruling party disproportionately in these special facilities.

We cannot definitively determine why quarantined voters in special polling places strongly supported the regime. Adding to the puzzle is that the phenomenon applies to the first round, but not the second round, of the elections. If voters located in the special polling places associated their medical care with the ruling party and, therefore, supported GD with their votes across majority of mobile PECs, then why did relative support of the ruling party in the second round approximate standard polling places? As there is no independent observation report from the mobile polling places, we can speculate on the processes that developed during the election, but we cannot specifically name the cause for the variation in the voter behavior in the first and second rounds of the election. These anomalies raise concerns about the conduct of elections under crisis conditions and require additional investigation in other contexts to better prepare election administrators to properly manage elections in future crises.

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1. Researchers have found that minority voters in the US were disproportionately assigned to poor quality polling places. While most of the research has focused on the US, many findings are confirmed in other settings (e.g., Bhatti 2012; Gibson et al. 2013; Harris 2021). Scholars have largely focused on turnout, but have also assessed partisan or outcome-based implications as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Despite these measures, research suggests that additional exposure caused by in-person voting was associated with excess deaths (Gilbreath and Silagadze 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <https://transparency.ge/en/content/television-georgia-–-ownership-control-and-regulation> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The region is also known as South Ossetia, although Tskhinvali is the preferred designation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CIVIL.ge recorded the number of COVID-19 cases in Georgia starting from the very first case. See: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/349237> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. CRRC public opinion polls are available at: <https://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2020/07/covid-19-monitor-new-report-on-georgian.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A report of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association on the 2020 parliamentary elections is available here: <https://gyla.ge/ge/post/saias-2020-tslis-saqartvelos-parlamentis-archevnebis-sadamkvirveblo-misiis-angarishi#sthash.lVBJF5jG.dpbs> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See the ODIHR Limited Observation Mission Report at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The 2020 Parliamentary Elections assessment by the International Republican Institution. Access online at: <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-final-georgia-election-report-reveals-increased-participation-need-for-continued-reforms/>. Also see the OSCE Election Observation Mission report: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights report is available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf>, October 31, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ISFED's assessment of the amendments to the electoral code of Georgia. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Information on DECs' permanent members is available on the official website of the CEC Georgia: <https://www.cesko.ge/ge/saarchevno-administratsia/olqebi/shemadgenloba> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/480500> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The GYLA report is available at: https://gyla.ge/files/news/ფონდი/2021/ნიუსლეთერები/არჩევნები-2020.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The NDI virtual observation report is available at: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20VEAT%20Statement%20Nov%202%202020%20-%20ENG%20-%20FINAL%20%281%29_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5013793?publication=0> and <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5019260?publication=2> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5246125?publication=0> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/documenct/view/5019260?publication=2> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. By our calculations, 1,912,310 valid ballots were cast. In addition, 65,272 invalid ballots were recorded. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The opposition has highlighted several challenges associated with mobile voting, including issues with registration, lack of observation during voting in quarantine locations, and concerns about fraud. See: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/491562/> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. More information on special polling places and special lists is available on <https://netgazeti.ge/news/491562/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The Statement of the Georgian CEC is available at: <http://electionreforms.ge/geo/list/show/3180-tsentraluri-saarchevno-komisia-saubno-saarchevno-komisiis-tsevrebs-mimartavs> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The NDI virtual observation report is available at: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20VEAT%20Statement%20Nov%202%202020%20-%20ENG%20-%20FINAL%20%281%29_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. NDI, which actively monitors elections in Georgia in ordinary circumstances, virtually conducted its analysis of the 2020 parliamentary elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. GYLA reported that they mobilized up to 750 observers out of their usual 1000 observers. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For further information and the size of observation groups, please visit <https://osgf.ge/saarchevno-media-centri-31-oqtombers-gaikhsneba/> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The report belongs to the National Democratic Institute (NDI). It is available at: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20VEAT%20Statement%20Nov%202%202020%20-%20ENG%20-%20FINAL%20%281%29_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. UNM participated as the leading party in the Strength is in Unity coalition during the 2020 parliamentary elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. We conducted difference of means tests to check if the GD performs better in mobile polling stations compared to standard polling stations. These tests confirm the observations from the visualization. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Invalid votes are not reported in 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajim.23199> and also <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7817783/> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. While we collected our data several months before the election, there is no compelling reason to believe that the outcomes would change along partisan lines if we had conducted the survey closer to the date of the election. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See: https://on.ge/story/50787-ხვალ-რომ-არჩევნები-იყოს-გაერთიანებულ-ოპოზიციას-55-დაუჭერს-მხარს-მთავარი-არხის-კვლევა and [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Universal masking was not a widespread recommendation at this time, hence its absence from the survey. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See: <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-unhelpful-advice-tractors-herbs-vodka-saunas-gurbanguly-lukashenka-vucic/30495810.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The effects of the sauna were only significant at the .10 level, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Other neighborhood characteristics, such as socio-economic or demographic features, could exert an influence on outcomes. It is possible that lower-income Georgians were at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. However, there is no available data supporting the hypothesis that the higher-income population in Georgia was more insulated from the COVID infection. Even if individuals of lower socioeconomic status were at a higher risk of getting infected with COVID-19 than those of higher economic status, we do not have evidence of strong socioeconomic effects on partisanship. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. This is the case in PEC 132291, for example. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lightly colored circles identify the locations of all standard PECs. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Please see the appendix for additional analysis that could not be included in the paper due to space limitations. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. These messages are generally protest notes, or otherwise expressions of dissatisfaction with the political process. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. One of the authors encountered this phenomenon while observing a different election. In Ukraine's 2002 parliamentary elections, the author was an official observer in a polling place located in a hospital. At that station, there were credible reports of staff improperly using the mobile ballot box and intimidating voters in their hospital beds to support the regime's preferred candidates. While we do not know if this phenomenon occurred in Georgia, it has a precedent in other regional elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)